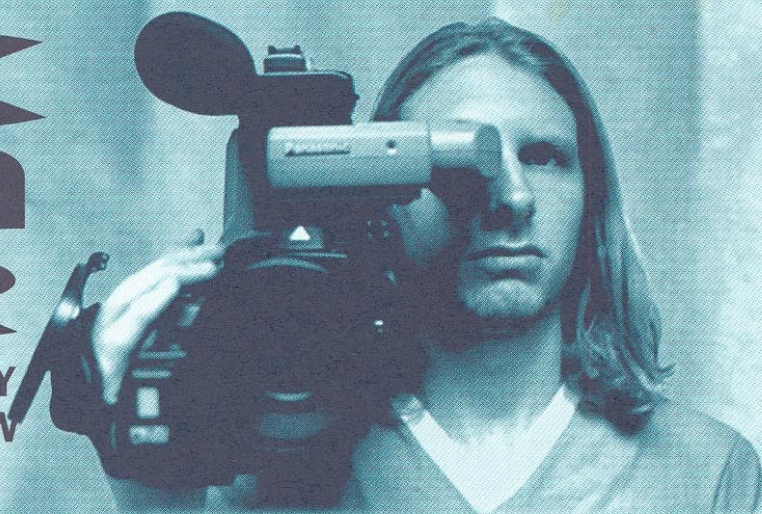




COMMUNITY  
MEDIA REVIEW



# ACCESS ACTIVISM ADVOCACY

The Journal of the  
Alliance for Community Media  
Volume 17, No. 2



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*Cover art: Simon Coffin, Antioch College*

### To Roxie

With the utmost respect and admiration, we dedicate this issue of *Community Media Review* to the life and spirit of Roxie Cole. Few ever exhibit the passion and dedication for this field that Roxie did. This access "stuff" coursed through her veins and fed her heart. In that, we can all take a lesson in living from Roxie.

*"For us... the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion. Albeit a stubborn one."*

— Albert Einstein



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-David Vogel, General Manager,  
Community Television of Knoxville

"The system is amazing in its simplicity and power. It involves the viewing audience directly and documents every phone call it receives. It helps make us indispensable to the community."

-Fred Thomas, Executive Director,  
Fairfax Cable Access

"Since installing the Interactive Video Bulletin Board, we've gotten more interest and participation from non-profits than we had in the last 10 years. It's less work, more effective, and it's fun for viewers to use!"

- Lynn Carillo-Cruz, Executive Director,  
Quote...Unquote, Albuquerque

"It's the lowest-cost, highest-impact service we offer to local non-profits. During September...participating organizations reported that an average of 65% of their calls resulted from viewership of the Interactive Video Bulletin Board."

- Barbara Popovic, Executive Director,  
Chicago Access Corporation

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## PUBLIC POLICY

### Moving Backward in the Courts and Ahead on Legislation

By Alan Bushong

**FCC Censorship Rules.** On February 16, the U.S. Court of Appeals in the DC, Circuit decided to rehear as a full panel the FCC Indecency Rules and the FCC Broadcast Indecency Safe Harbor cases. Rulings favorable to the Alliance and communities had been issued last November by the three judge panel of Chief Judge Mikva and Judges Wald and Edwards. Shea & Gardner will continue to represent the Alliance in this case, which will be heard October 19. The Alliance is concerned by this action, but will continue to press for a successful conclusion. The stay of implementation remains in effect.

The Alliance once again thanks those who generously contributed to public policy initiatives. The Alliance paid \$10,000 to Shea & Gardner to cover a portion of out-of-pocket costs in a case which has easily reached six figures worth of legal services.

Any attempts at censorship should be immediately reported to the Alliance office.

**The Public Interest Summit.** Over 600 members of public interest organizations converged on Washington, DC on March 29 for the Public Interest Summit coordinated by the Benton Foundation and former Alliance Chair Andrew Blau. Alliance Chair Tony Riddle participated on the first panel "Delivering the Goods: Meeting Public Needs?" Morning session panelists and audience questioners frequently referred to public, educational and governmental access. A primary benefit resulting from the summit is the stimulus to ongoing coalition work on current legislation.

**Legislation.** The Alliance continues work with coalition groups in the House and Senate. The Alliance is concerned about reserving free channel capacity and in providing funding for PEG access services, equipment and facilities.

Alliance Chair Tony Riddle testified at House hearings on HR 3636 (the Markey Bill). Thanks to work with Representatives Markey (MA) and Richardson (NM) and their staffs, the House version includes language which requires comparable PEG access requirements for cable and telephone companies providing television services. The Alliance remains concerned, however, that the lack of local control proposed in the bill will hinder the flow of resources to communities.

Check the Alliance Bulletin Board for up-to-date news on legislation.

Alan Bushong chairs the Alliance's Public Policy Committee. He is executive director of Capital Community Television, 585 Liberty St., Salem, OR 97308-2342. Telephone 503/588-2288. Fax 503/588-6055.

### Roxie Cole, 1931-1994

**Roxie Cole** died February 8, 1994, in Dayton, Ohio. As in her life, Roxie's death from cancer brought her loved ones together, appreciating and missing all she had given them and mirroring that love, too. She had suffered more than her share in 63 years, but Roxie also loved life and made a real difference, especially in community access.

During the mid-seventies Roxie became a pioneer community programmer while working as a secretary for the Dayton-Miami Valley Consortium of Colleges and Universities. After her boss uncovered some federal grant money, Roxie was named Operations Manager for the DMVCC's *REACH* series, offering subscribers in such cabled communities as Xenia and Wilberforce live and taped instructional programs on life skills from diapering to first aid.

When the *REACH* money ran out, Roxie found new horizons surrounding Dayton's cable bidding war. Roxie started Access-Dayton in 1977 in an old white house on the grounds of a local seminary with left-



over "Reach" gear, \$5,000 in seed money from the city and a state grant of \$30,000. This Executive Director often asked her staff, "What matters most to Joe and Mary Beercan?" and kept their focus on public service.

Ten years later, Access-Dayton was recognized as the outstanding public

access center in the nation by the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers (now Alliance for Community Media). In 1985, Roxie herself received our organization's highest personal honor, *The George Stoney Award for Humanistic Communications*.

As a life member, Roxie Cole found great allies and dear friends in the NFLCP (Alliance). Even among such activists, she was both shaker and mover. When Rox called herself, as she often did, "the bitch in the back of the room," not everybody smiled. But, her forceful questions came at important times, often stopping us from just doing the comfortable thing and forcing us to consider what was right and fair.

Maybe that is why we miss her so - we always knew Roxie cared.

- Greg Vawter for Community Media Review

*Melissa Mills, program/marketing assistant, and Richard Latimer, production assistant, of Dayton Access Television, are compiling an historical tape dealing with the life and work of Roxie Cole. They're looking for materials of Roxie's involvement in the national and regional NFLCP (Alliance) and any archival material of Roxie at DATV, conferences or parties on 1/2", 3/4" or reel to reel video tape. Photographs are also welcome, as are short videos of any thoughts and feelings about Roxie you would like to share. The resulting half-hour documentary should be ready for showing at the national conference in Hawaii. Time is short. Contact them at DATV, 280 Leo St., Dayton, OH 45404. Telephone 513/223-5311.*



Roxie and her Access-Dayton staff in March 1990.



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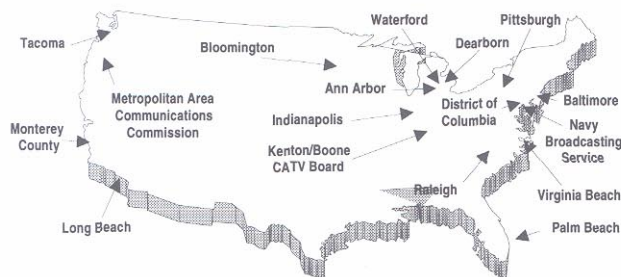
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### 1,800 Entries in Hometown

Local cable programmers from across the United States and Canada sent an even 1,800 entries to the Alliance's 1994 *Hometown Video Festival*.

Entries came from 377 cities in 40 states, Guam, and six Canadian provinces.

Now in its 17th year, the *Hometown Video Festival* is the oldest and largest video competition honoring the work of local cable programmers. The Festival includes 37 categories, including four "Overall Excellence" categories which honor outstanding public, educational, and government access facilities and local origination centers.

Hometown entries are judged in a two-step process involving 32 different access facilities and cable companies as preliminary sites. Each site selected four finalists from their assigned categories which were forwarded to the Boston Community Access and Programming Foundation, this year's final judging site.

Hometown winners will be announced and awards presented on July 21, 1994 in Honolulu, Hawai'i at an Awards Ceremony during the International Conference and Trade Show of the Alliance for Community Media.

Patron sponsor is Bravo. Sustaining sponsors of the 1994 Hometown Video Festival include MultiChannel News, Cablevision magazine, and Cable World magazine. Category sponsors include Cablevision Systems Corporation, The Discovery Channel, 3M Audio and Video Markets Division, and The Weather Channel.

For more information: Randy VanDalsen, Hometown Video Festival, c/o The Buske Group, 3001 "J" Street, Suite 201, Sacramento, CA 95816, 916/441-6277.

### Counter-programming Videotape Available

A seven minute video entitled, "Why Is This Stuff On Anyway?" is available from Chicago Access Corporation. This video was produced by Chicago Access in cooperation with the American Civil Liberties Union and features an interview with ACLU staff Counsel Jane Whicher, who discusses the

First Amendment virtues of public access television.

This tape provides a concise description of public access television and why it is neither legal or desirable to censor speech from access channels.

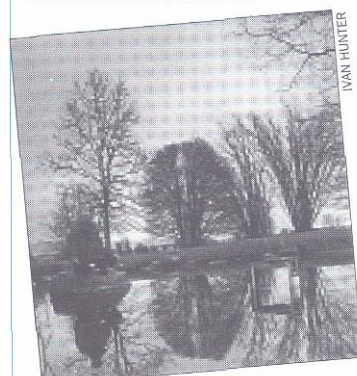
Copies of the tape are available at no charge. To obtain a copy send a blank VHS or 3/4" U-matic tape with return postage to Greg Boozell, Program Director, Chicago Access Corporation, 322 S. Green Street, Chicago, IL 60607, or call 312/738-1400.

### Videotape on NII Available

Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR) held a conference April 23-24 on public interest issues in the National Information Infrastructure. The conference was co-sponsored by Cambridge Community TV and the Center for Media Education.

A two-hour edited tape of the selected speakers is available and includes authors Herbert Schiller and Benjamin Barber and representatives of the Alliance, Center for Media Education, Freenets Community Networking, and OMB Watch.

Cost of the tape is \$20. Checks should be made out to CPSR/ Boston and sent to Hans Klein, 179 Appleton St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Telephone 617/876-9127. Email: hkklein@mit.edu.



### Errata

The last issue of CMR featured an evocative cover photo (shown above) which should have been credited to Ivan Hunter. The photo was a fitting tribute to the issue's theme, Media Literacy.

Also in that issue, the two photos appearing with a story on the National Telemedia Council should have been attributed to Paul Whiting.



# Hawai'i Welcomes International Access Advocates

*The 50th state selected as this year's site for the Alliance for Community Media's  
1994 International Conference & Trade Show, July 20-23*

The Alliance has selected Hawai'i as this year's host state for its annual conference scheduled for July 20-23 at the Ala Moana Hotel in Honolulu. *Kai 'i kaleo, e ho'omau ke aka*. This Hawaiian phrase which means *Protect the Voice, Perpetuate the Vision*, underscores the theme of *Community Media and Technological Convergence* for this year's 1994 International Conference and Trade Show.

The Alliance selected Hawai'i as this year's conference site in part because of the leadership access centers on the islands are showing as models for other centers around the U.S. and around the world. Hawaiians have had to overcome unique communications challenges related to geographic isolation and multi-cultural constituencies and have emerged as leaders in the use of access media.

The Alliance anticipates that this year's conference will bring together an estimated 1,000 people from around the country and the world. More than 42 workshops are planned with presentations from more than 100 policy makers, access leaders, attorneys, consultants, producers and other supporters of community media. Topics will highlight the emerging technologies and the latest in community-based communications in addition to presenting new information on franchise renewal, public policy, fundraising, strategic planning and other important community-access issues.

Keynote presenter Larry Irving, Jr. will share his vision of what the technological future means for our communities and how citizens will access these critical communications tools. Irving is Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information and the Administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

Workshops will include:

**The National Information Infrastructure** – Everyone is talking about the NII but have you wondered what exactly it is? Informed presenters will answer your questions and demonstrate how we can have an impact in legislative and policy debates.

**Community Communications Centers** – Workshops will examine how public, educational and government access centers can position themselves to continue to provide valuable community communications services in our ever-changing information technology age. Participants will design a community communications center of the future and develop a plan to meet the evolving communications need of our communities.

**Technology and Technical issues** – How will compression, fiber optics, telephony, computers, and cable systems work together in the fast approaching telecommunications landscape? Will you understand what's happening before you get left out of the loop? Presenters will make technology easy to understand and will analyze new communications technologies as to their usefulness to access, educational and government entities. Technology workshops will also provide hands-on experience highlighting non-linear editing systems, and an analysis of formats competing for access dollars. The latest software for organizing production facilities, offices and tracking data bases will also be showcased.

**Cyberschool** – Proactive approaches for assessing the telecommunications landscape in your town. Strategies for moving your access center beyond cable. Practical examples of current and emerging community communications models in the U.S. and abroad. Exercises, techniques and handouts that can be adapted locally.

## PEG Access in Hawai'i

### *A Mold for the Future of Community Media and High Technology*

The upcoming Alliance conference theme *Community Media and Technological Convergence: Protect the Voice, Perpetuate the Vision* sets new sights on the uses for technology – whether through the fiber optics of cable television or new frontiers in cyberspace – whether worldwide teletalk and video-conferencing or used as a preserving force for cultures striving to exist in the next century.

The state of Hawai'i has been heralded as a great supporter of high technology. But Hawai'i's uniqueness lies not only in its high tech reputation but because it combines such ambitions with its culturally diverse and economically shifting community. As its decades-long agricultural-based economy began

to wane in the 1970s, the state looked to the future by fostering an information-based society.

Perhaps the greatest, most visionary accomplishment is the collaborative nature of Hawai'i's development of PEG access. As one of only three states in the nation that regulates cable, Hawai'i's access corporations are positioned as part of the state strategy for the development of high tech industries and telecommunications infrastructure.

By managing PEG access as a collaborative effort



continued next page

## Aloha Kaua (Warm Greetings)

The theme for this year is *Kia 'i Kaleo E Ho'o Mau Ke Aka (Protect the Voice, Perpetuate the Vision)*. In the Hawaiian language, one word may have several meanings, such as *Kia 'i*, which means guard, watchman, caretaker. The Alliance for Community Media is just that. The word *malama* could have been used, but the term is delicate, whereas *Kia 'i* shows strength and endurance. *Ho'o mau*, to continue, preserve, endure, last – this is what we perceive the Alliance does, with its continuing efforts in Washington, DC and through its conferences. *Aka* means carefully, slowly.

The Hawaiian language is not spoken like the English language, but is composed by a deep emotional feeling within the statement. Our theme could have been expressed in many ways, but to capture the essence of the Alliance, we felt that *Kia 'i Kaleo E Ho'o Mau Ke Aka* reveals the true spirit of the Alliance for Community Media. The theme also holds great spiritual treasure for both the Native Hawaiian, the people of Hawai'i and those afar.

*Mai keia manawa a mau loa aku* (From now to eternity, now and forever),

– Alfred "Junior" Ekau, Jr.  
Chair, Local Planning Committee



# If you haven't joined the Alliance for Community Media, here's how to become a member.

## MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT FORM

(Please check all that apply)

Yes, I want to join the Alliance for Community Media. I am a(n):

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☐ Community Producer ☐ Cable Regulatory Staff or Board Member  
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☐ Local origination ☐ Leased access ☐ Other

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☐ Native American ☐ Other ☐ Female ☐ Male

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between public, education and government entities, many alliances have been forged. For example, all access centers in the state may carry programming delivered through a point to point microwave service provided by the local PBS affiliate, a service benefiting the public school and the state university systems especially. On O'ahu, one campus in the university system has been contracted to serve as a satellite center providing facilities to the public. Also on O'ahu, the access channel providing public affairs and issues programming (as opposed to a "government channel") gives the public equal time to present issues independent of government control. Never the 'twain shall meet? Not in Hawai'i.

Franchise renewal, regulated by the state, led to the creation of non-profit access centers in each county beginning in 1990. Serving the island of O'ahu, 'Ölelo: The Corporation for Community Television has one of the most generous awards for PEG access support since the 1984 Cable Act went into effect. Founded in 1990, 'Ölelo is also the model for PEG access on the outer islands of Kaua'i, Maui and the Big Island of Hawai'i. Ho'Ike: The Kaua'i Community Television opened its doors in July 1993, with Akakū: Maui Community Television beginning services to its Maui communities in October of the same year. Na Leo 'O Hawai'i, on the Big Island of Hawai'i, is currently in the process of establishing its organizational structure and determining community needs.

The technological environment in Hawai'i is also one of the most inspiring in the nation.

➤ The state Public Utilities Commission is currently investigating Hawai'i's telecommunication infrastructure, with 'Ölelo acting as intervenor in the proceedings.

➤ The Maui High Performance Computing Center, one of only 12 such enterprises in the United States, is Hawai'i's vehicle on the information superhighway.

➤ The Hawaiian Wide Area Integrated Information Access Network (HAWAIIAN) links the state's government centers and technically supports Hawaii FYI, a public electronics services gateway. Hawaii FYI is one of the programs managed by Hawai'i INC (Hawaii Information Network Corporation), a public corporation established by the state to promote the development of an information industry in Hawai'i.

➤ The State Department of Education and University of Hawai'i are piloting Video Connect, the new GTE Hawaiian Tel service offered through its World Class Network. Eight sites on six islands will be connected simultaneously through voice-activated controls for digital videoconferencing.

➤ The nonprofit Mānoa Innovation Center, managed by the High Technology Development Corporation, provides seed money and facilities for start-up companies developing high-tech products.

➤ The islands' access centers carry programming via the Hawai'i Interactive Television System (HITS) network, a point-to-point microwave link managed by Hawai'i Public Television. The multi-channel, closed-circuit system delivers signals among the six main islands, turning traditional classrooms into video learning spaces for the State Department of Education and the University of Hawai'i's seven campuses.

➤ 'Ölelo is the first PEG access corporation to provide regular coverage of the state legislature. Also delivered by HITS, the gavel to gavel coverage of the legislature, taped in Honolulu, is carried to each island, giving constituents across the state a living-room view of their government representatives at work.

PEG access in Hawai'i has fully embraced the enterprise of a comprehensive information infrastructure. By delivering cable and related technology to new limits, Hawai'i's access centers support the communities they were entrusted to serving by carrying their voice further and strengthening their vision.





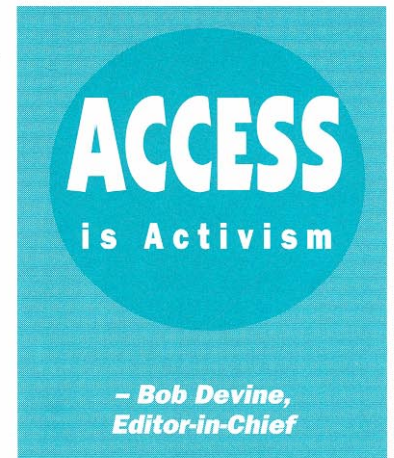
Public access is by nature activist. It involves bringing private citizens into public life, encouraging civic involvement and the practice of local culture, and providing the means for communities to discuss and debate issues of importance. It creates a public space free from the interventions of the state and the constraints of the marketplace in which it is possible to speak one's mind, articulate grievances, test ideas, dialogue with others, and organize around issues and concerns or common cultural interests.

Public access intervenes in the 'culture of silence' created by the mass media. While some argue that the lack of participation on the part of the disenfranchised can be attributed to apathy, lack of interest or even laziness, and that strong participation is a consequence of a high level of political awareness, John Gaventa (*Power and Powerlessness*: 1984) argues that it may well be true that it is **participation itself** which builds and enhances political consciousness. Access provides participants with the sort of experiences which build self-esteem, agency, and critical consciousness. Public access recognizes that the creation and circulation of culture is linked with the development of political consciousness. In communities all across America, access creates activists.

Public access in the United States was born of the activist efforts of a coalition of independent artists, community activists, social visionaries and public policy makers. This diverse coalition proved to be a powerful force in shaping public policy with regard to telecommunications and in championing the public good. The coming of the National Information Infrastructure seems to be framed more in private than in public terms; the infrastructure will deliver privatized services and will be market-driven. A coalition of public interest groups has formed a Telecommunications Policy Roundtable in an attempt to set a public agenda for the information infrastructure, but given the cast of powerful commercial forces lined up to build the electronic superhighway, one wonders if the public interest coalition is as broad, as deep or as activist as it needs to be to play a significant role in this round of policy-making.

This issue of CMR is about activism, activists, advocacy and community based media. Roger Bailey provides some insight into the intersection of the artistic impulse and the activist commitment with regard to environmental issues. Peter Lowe provides an inspiring profile of high-concept, low-resource community television in Nepal. In her article on Vancouver Cooperative Radio, Dorothy Kidd frames some provocative questions and suggests some interesting lessons for public access drawn from various models of community radio in Canada. Chris Hill profiles independent media activism in eastern Europe during a period of dramatic political, economic and social reform, and draws parallels between the post-reform erosion of public space in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania and our own situation in the United States. In the access arena, David Keyes discusses the advocacy and organizing efforts around cable re-franchising in Seattle, Victor Sanchez profiles the access activities of community based groups in Manhattan, and I have attempted to suggest some approaches to linking access training to social activism.

There are several ideas in this activism and advocacy theme that are worth reiterating. The first is that in the shadow of the information infrastructure, it behooves us to mobilize a significant advocacy effort in behalf of the public interest. The second is that a broad vision of community media activism can be extremely helpful in reflecting upon our own work in public access. The third is that public access is inherently activist and simply cannot be a passive system.





## From Media Artist to Video Activist

By Roger Bailey

**H**ave you seen that black and white videotape where a guy sits in front of a camera with his shirt off and his torso looks like a face in which his nipples are the eyes and his navel is the mouth and he makes his stomach sing? Or the tape where he drools milk out of his mouth as he crawls backwards on all fours and then this dog comes around the corner and licks up the line of milk until he bumps his nose into the lens of the camera?

During the 1970s, the artist William Wegman, often aided by Man Ray, his pet Weimaraner, made these and many other very short and technically uncomplicated video pieces. Fifteen years ago I really admired Wegman's work. As an artist and teacher I appreciated Wegman's humor and dead pan presentations and his cool way of relating to the art world's formalist tendencies.

I had access to a camcorder in the late '70s and I tried to make tapes inspired by Wegman. I laid down beneath a camera and spoke intimately to inanimate objects that I tenderly placed on my face. In one particularly clever segment I put a playing card in my mouth and mumbled, "If my sexual desire for a playing card gets in the way of my communicating with her, than I should tell her about my problem. I did that once before and the playing card appreciated it — but the husband did not." And in another attempt at Wegman I picked up lintballs off a rather untidy carpet for five minutes, all the while chanting, "When I can just lie on the rug picking up lintballs, then I will no longer be too ambitious."

Few people have seen my "art tapes" and no one has told me that beneath the engaging comedic surface of my work were provocative ideas. I was dissatisfied. Then, in 1985, a colleague teaching environmental chemistry asked me to travel with him to Auburn, Maine, to record various problems associated with a municipal waste incinerator. As a result, my video work took on new meaning as I began to record environmental problems and as I began to realize the potential of video to give a voice to the victims of environmental abuses. In the past nine years I have evolved from a media artist to a video activist who now makes a kind of "tactical television," participating in the movement for environmental justice.

In creating Video-Active Productions, Paul Connett

and I have attempted to use independently produced and distributed videotape as a tool to provide the information and encouragement that will assist communities in finding the best solutions to their problems of waste management. By promoting communication and interaction, we believe independent video can operate in a "public space" where it is possible to share information and skills that will spark dialogue and action as it helps build confidence in a threatened community.

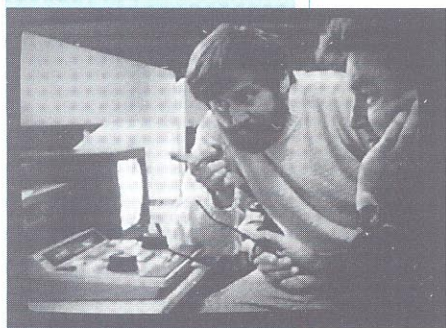
Since that first trip to Maine, Paul Connett and I have made forty tapes. Our work has focused on municipal waste, hazardous waste, bio-medical waste, recycling, composting, geothermal energy and issues related to dioxin. We do not promote one easy solution to a problem but we do intend to be a voice in the debate about the future of this planet. Most of our tapes have been made in response to a community's cries for help. We believe that everyone and every community has a story to tell but we know these same people and communities often lack the tools to communicate their stories and the self-assurance that their concerns are "valid" or "worthwhile".

In 1990 Connett and I, assisted by Honolulu based Sheila Laffey, made a tape titled *Geothermal: A Risky Business in Hawaii's Wao Kele O Puna Rainforest*. Various groups were opposed to plans made by private developers and some state politicians to tape geothermal energy to generate 500 megawatts of electrical energy on Hawaii's Big Island. Individually these groups have not been particularly successful in opposing this development scheme, but in part because we were "outsiders," Paul Connett and I were able to bring together, at least on video tape, many of those groups that were opposed to geothermal development in Hawaii. We interviewed leading scientists, economists, physicians, energy experts, engineers, activists, native Hawaiians, musician Jerry Garcia and Pulitzer prize-winning poet W.S. Merwin and created a 57 minute tape

**As an academic and an activist, I believe it is vitally important that all citizens are not only able to read and write but that they have the opportunity to develop a visual literacy, that will enable them to watch media critically and produce media effectively.**

that has played a significant part in the debate over geothermal energy. Our tape examines the dangers to human health, the threats to the rainforest, the concerns of the native Hawaiians, the viability of the project, the problems of transmitting power overland and undersea from the Big Island to Honolulu, the economics of the project, and the alternative methods of saving 500 megawatts of electrical energy through efficiency and conservation measures. This tape has been shown more than a hundred times on Hawaii Public Television.

We believe that every one and every community has a story to tell but we know these same people and communities often lack the tools to communicate their stories and the self-assurance that their concerns are "valid" or "worthwhile".



Roger Bailey and Paul Connett of Video-Active Productions.



Our agenda is driven by content and the desire to share knowledge and ideas to help people become an active part of the political process. Because we are concerned about how a community thinks about itself and its future, we want to give residents the opportunity to express their voices directly, and to reach broader politics. More and more people are becoming aware of the fact that low-income, non-English speaking communities and people of color are disproportionately exposed to environmentally hazardous conditions.

**Hazardous Waste Incineration: A Scandal in North Carolina** focuses on several men who worked at a hazardous waste incinerator and suffered permanent damage because the company they worked for did not provide them with the proper knowledge, training, safety, equipment and procedures that would have protected them. These workers, as well as local residents, were eager to tell their stories to us because they wanted to save others from a similar fate.

As an academic and an activist, I believe it is vitally important that all citizens are not only able to read and write but that they have the opportunity to develop a *visual* literacy, that will enable them to *watch* media critically and *produce* media effectively. I would like to see all communities have the opportunity to articulate their ideas with the most effective communication tools of our time.

For many years we were told by people from the Dupont Chemical Co. that we could anticipate "Better Living Through Chemistry." Certainly in terms of organo-chlorines, that promise was a lie. As a result of production of nearly forty million tons of chlorinated compounds worldwide each year, many very toxic and persistent by-products such as dioxins and furans are building up in the environment and in human tissues. Many leading scientists and environmental groups such as Greenpeace now advocate a phase-out of chlorine production.

In response to the problems surrounding dioxin, in September of 1991 over 200 citizens, activists, scientists, Vietnam veterans and government officials all determined to find the truth related to the dioxin issue, met for The First Citizens' Conference on Dioxin.

Paul Connett and I worked for a year to transform two days of recorded presentations from the Dioxin Conference into a series of ten video tapes. We added video images and superimposed computer generated graphics to help clarify many points with the intent of presenting coherent and lively documents without distorting the presentations. Our intent was to create a series of tapes that would be useful to all citizens who are battling any process or facility that is a source of dioxin, e.g. all types of incineration. We wanted to move dioxin from the chemistry textbook into its broader political and social context, and to promote the urgent need to *prevent* the formation of dioxin rather than trying to *control* it once it had been produced. Additionally, we wanted to reveal that when a toxic substance like dioxin impinges on

powerful political and economic interests, science and truth are early victims.

Over 5,000 VHS copies of our tapes have been distributed, primarily around the U.S. and Canada, but they have been sent to Europe, the former U.S.S.R., Australia and elsewhere as well.

**Waste Management as if the Future Mattered** is the single most popular tape we have produced. Its success is due primarily to Connett's ability to put technical information into plain English and to keep an audience's attention with measured doses of humor and animated tirades against ignorance, abuse and greed.

Because neither Paul nor I are willing to focus on grant-writing or fund-raising, we rely on sales of videotapes (at \$25 each, including shipping) to pay production, duplication and distribution costs of nearly all of our tapes. It is not our intention to make a profit but to break even.

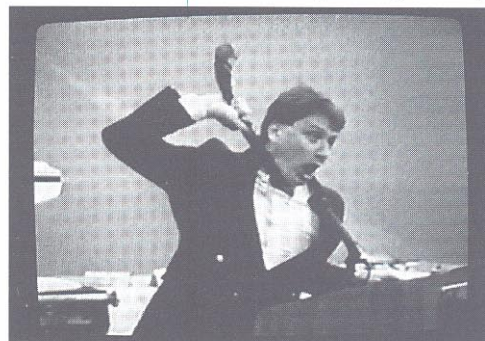
Organizations such as Greenpeace and Citizens' Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste refer people to us to provide video tapes but it is primarily through newsletters from grassroots groups, and word of mouth that people hear about us. There are a number of resource guides available that list our tapes and a school or library will most likely contact us through that source. Grassroots organizations and citizen activists continue to be the primary users of our tapes and high school and college classes, public libraries, state and local officials and agencies, environmental organizations and even representatives of the waste industry have used our tapes effectively. Several of our tapes have helped persuade the national media to focus attention on the issues we have covered.

As an illustration of how modest efforts can sometimes go a long way, I recently sent a 3/4" submaster of **Waste Management as if the Future Mattered**, converted to the PAL standard, to Prague in the Czech Republic, where a group intends to translate, duplicate and distribute the tape. We have never denied permission or charged anyone to make copies of our work. I was a bit shocked but also pleased when someone once called to say they had made over 300 copies of one of

**Still frames from a series of videotapes on Waste Management as if the Future Mattered.**



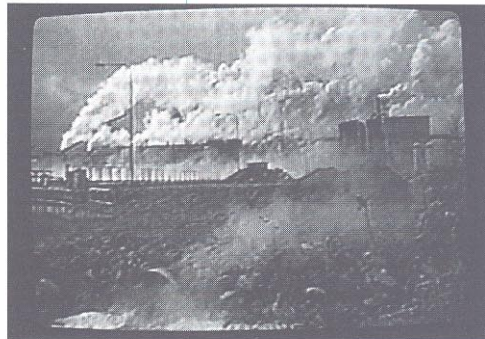
*Agent Orange Cover-Up*



*Incineration a la Monty Python*



*Manipulation and Fraud*



*Uses and Abuses of Health Risk Assessment*

**continued next page**



our tapes and they were giving copies away. Efforts such as these have often led to the defeat of incinerator proposals.

Over the past several years I have had over 60 requests for permission to air our tapes on cable access television. Considering that there are approximately 2,000 communities around the U.S. with some form of public access television, there are certainly opportunities to reach more audiences than we have. Community access television offers an audience of potential new activists. In addition to providing valuable content we hope our projects serve as a model for other groups to produce meaningful media.

Someone once said, "You can use television or you can be used by it." Although the technical quality of our tapes may be less than what some have come to expect from their experiences with commercial television, we are not competing with major networks. Our primary mission is to serve our audience. I have permitted and encouraged several video activists to re-edit our tapes to relate more specifically to the needs of a local community.

All of this means that our tapes are part of a process — they are not *products* marked with the autonomy of private expression or artistic merit. But in our efforts to combat apathy, passivity and alienation we have been known to employ certain strategies including humor, exaggeration, surprise and the outrageous to underscore and communicate important ideas.

People who feel their health and their lives are threatened don't need and don't want slick production values and elaborate editing techniques and are not concerned with questions related to aesthetic beauty or innovation. What citizens want are facts and testimonies and honest images that can be in their hands quickly. For me, the question of excellence has shifted from the formal qualities of the tape to my ability to get useful information to people when they need it most.

And what about William Wegman and his Weimaraner? I've read that Man Ray died, and there is not a Fay Ray, but I have not heard much recently about Wegman. If he is still making videos and his stomach still looks like a face, I hope the words coming out of his navel are promoting activist use of video. There's a lot of work to be done.

Roger Bailey teaches at St. Lawrence University and is co-founder of Video-Active Productions. If you would like a brochure which describes the Video-Active Production series of videotapes on Waste Management and on Dioxin, write to Roger Bailey, Video Active Productions, Rt. 2, Box 322, Canton, New York 13617. Phone 315/386-8797.

## Youth-Produced and Youth-Identified Video >>

### Black Planet Productions

P.O. Box 435, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10003-0435, 212/886-3701

- ▶ "The Media Wilder Pseudo-Graduates" — A personal and off-beat look at college graduation ceremonies through the eyes of a young African-American male, produced by the Not Channel Zero collective.
- ▶ "The Summa '91 Show" — A documentary by Not Channel Zero on the St. John's Rape trial, Dr. Jeffries/City College controversy, the 'Ms. Saigon protest and the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings.

### Educational Video Center

60 E. 13th St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10003, 212/254-2848

- ▶ "Huddlin in the Chill: Homeless Youth" — Homeless teens speak openly about the families they left, the difficulties of independence and their strategies for survival.
- ▶ "Unequal Education: Failing Our Children" — Explores inconsistencies in resources and opportunities in the educational system through the eyes of four recent high school graduates.
- ▶ "Two Babies: A critical Analysis of Television in the '90s" — College age youth examine the relationships young people have to TV growing up and its effects on them.
- ▶ "Trash They Neighbor" — A humorous hip-hop video by YO-TV (Youth Organizers Television) in which teenagers look at recycling and garbage reduction.

### Foundation for Media Education

26 Center St., Northampton, MA 01060, 413/586-4170

- ▶ "Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video" — A documentary by Sut Jhally on sexism in rock video on MTV.

### Media Watch

P.O. Box 618, Santa Cruz, CA 95061

- ▶ "Warning: The Media may be Hazardous to your Health" — A media literacy video that addresses sexism and racism in movies, cartoons and news media.

### Paper Tiger TV

339 Lafayette Street, New York, NY 10012, 212/420-8196

- ▶ "Torn Between Colors" — Black and Latino high school students look at racial images in the media.

### Rise and Shine Productions

300 West 43rd Street, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, 212/265-2509

- ▶ "Asian Stereotypes" — Youth produced video on stereotypes of Asian Americans
- ▶ "Beauty Beyond the Media's Eyes" — How young women of color feel about how women are portrayed in the media.
- ▶ "Blind Alley" — Dealing with homophobic youth facing the reality of gay-bashing
- ▶ "Trials and Traditions" — Produced by youth team led by Native American high school students, dealing with problems and perspectives of Native American urban youth.

### Video Project

5332 College Avenue, Suite 101, Oakland, CA 94618, 800/4-Planet

- ▶ "Get it Together" — Youth produced documentary on youth organizing for social and environmental change, comes with guide to regional youth organizing groups.



## The Revolving Grant Fund of Manhattan Neighborhood Network

By Victor Sanchez

**A**t the Children's Art Carnival in Harlem, a young woman is in the process of creating a videotape on the Apollo Theater.

In Chelsea, residents and clients of community-based organizations are signing up for classes in video production.

On the Upper West Side, teenagers are producing a videotape about the transition from high-school to college.

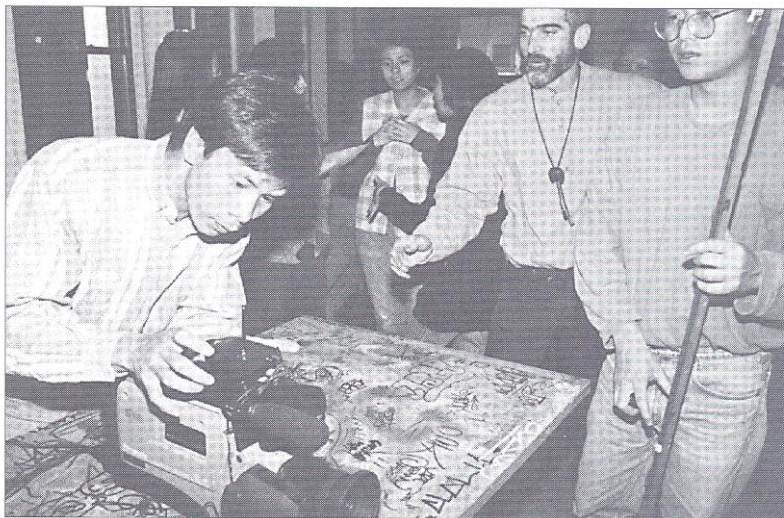
In midtown five self-advocacy groups within United Cerebral Palsy will begin to receive training in camcorder production and editing.

All of these individuals are being trained through the Revolving Grant Fund of Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Designed to bring video training and production opportunities to different neighborhoods, The Revolving Grant Fund provides \$25,000 each to 10 community-based organizations to set up training workshops and access to equipment on a neighborhood level. The organizations receiving Revolving Grant Fund support engage people from teenagers to adults, speaking languages ranging from Spanish to the Chinese dialects of Mandarin and Cantonese, in finding out about the opportunities of public access and how they can be used by the community.

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning in East Harlem, after bringing their children and grandchildren to schools in the neighborhood, 15-20 women climb five flights of stairs in a former parochial school on east 106th street to take two hours of instruction in video production at The El Barrio Popular Education Program.

Recently the group was studying commercials from Spanish language television as part of a lesson in how to convey effective messages in a short period of time. In this lesson their goal was to understand the techniques used in the commercials and put them to better use in the production of messages of importance to the East Harlem community.

They counted the shots that made up the commercial. Afterwards they spoke among themselves about the genre known as the 30-second spot and analyzed the impact of rapid-fire montages, narra-



*Students prepare to interview striking restaurant workers.*

tion and music. Sometimes they watched the commercial with the sound off, examining the arrangement of close-ups and wide shots. Later they set up a camcorder and practiced camerawork and interview techniques on each other.

Other exercises involved participating in direct address to the camera so they could become comfortable in front of the camera as well as behind it.

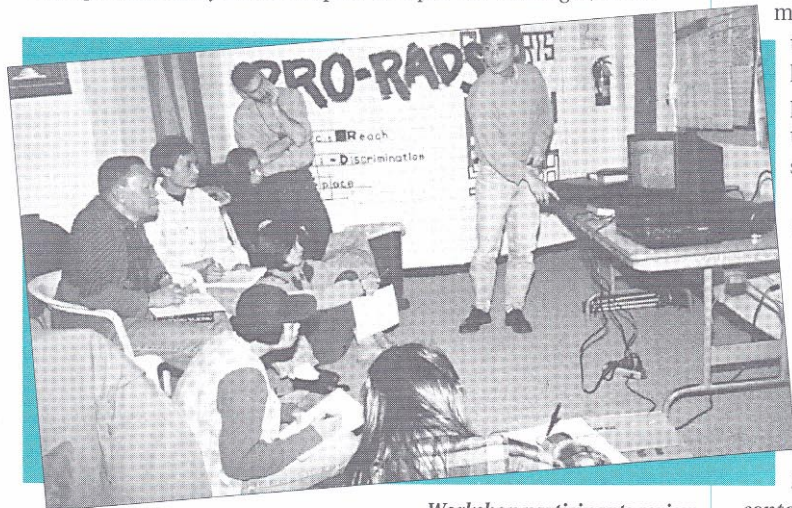
"Classes are designed to help people become comfortable with both the equipment and the visual language of video," says Pedro Rivera, who teaches the video workshops at El Barrio Popular Education Project. "Right now it's a combination of a teaching effort as well as an organizing effort. The goal is to set up a training program for now as well as a core group of producers that can sustain the project."

Once basic training is complete, students often become interested in producing stories about how they came to North America and profiling people and places in East Harlem.

As these individuals take a class and pick up a camera and microphone for the first time, whether immigrant or native-born, they are learning to document the events which are their daily lives. From drawings on cave walls to super-8 home movies of parents and grandparents, to videos of births and weddings, these rites of passage, when preserved, are for the most part shared only by an immediate family.

The Revolving Grant Fund seeks to include more people in the public access family called Manhattan Neighborhood Network. Part of the success of the Revolving Grant will come from the "family portraits" painted with electronic palates of communities and "passing" these portraits around among people sitting at home watching television, enriched by the moment of seeing members of their family that they may not even met yet.

Victor Sanchez is Director of Education and Outreach for the Manhattan Neighborhood Network. For further information, contact Manhattan Neighborhood Network, 110 East 23rd Street, 10th Floor, New York, New York 10010. Phone 212/260-2670.



*Workshop participants review and critique an interview.*



# Activating Access

*Every Step Forward Moves the Horizon One Step Further*

By David Keyes

Advances in technology, forward movement in communication patterns and community realities are also changing the survival environment for public access. We face an era of tight finances and increasing focus on technological promise (or decoy!). The corporate cowboys are gathering up a herd and riding down the info highway. How do we get on? Will we be road kill? Access activists in the Seattle, Washington area are finding that promoting public participation and a public access infrastructure requires a reclaiming of the access mission and the development of an advocacy approach that recognizes technological growth. It is an exciting and frightening time to be promoting community communications. In this article, I will present some of our dilemmas and discoveries in the refranchising process as well as discuss some of the essential elements of access advocacy. Of course, no campaign is complete without a couple mottoes. Try these on for size: "Don't just wade in the quagmire, dive in!" or "Access advocacy: stumble with intention."

Access advocacy is a process of creating impact. Access advocacy in cable begins long before refranchising and lasts long afterwards. It is important to know the provisions of the franchise agreement, to encourage written documentation of any problems and non-compliance and perhaps most important, to develop a community of people who watch, produce, or otherwise participate in access. In Seattle access has suffered from a lack of active outreach, promotion and support, leaving a rather narrow range of programming and a lack of integration into the community infrastructure. While there is a strong body of community active people and organizations, there has been little in the way of an organized access community since franchising fourteen years ago. This has made access advocacy here a groundbreaking process rather than a small step on the continuum. In our case, it has become more complicated with both King County and the City of Seattle refranchising. King County is currently in the formal negotiation process with TCI and in informal negotiation with other companies. The city is involved in informal negotiations with Viacom and TCI. In many ways, we are playing catch-up to other access communities. However the results may be significant.

Two years ago, a small group comprised of former cable board representatives, public access cable users and community activists gathered to talk about the upcoming cable refranchising. We had complaints, we had experience, we were deeply concerned about public involvement. We also found that we couldn't talk about the future of access on cable without involving

the larger spectrum of electronic communications! We met a lot, took an aspirin, called ourselves *Electra: A Coalition for Electronic Democracy* and began work.

Advocacy is a transforming process of planning, action and reaction. It requires understanding and forging a relationship with the system that will enable reaching your goal. One must identify the enablers of the system. In access, the franchising authority is the primary enabler, though there are many other subtle and not so subtle influencers. Up the line, Congress and the FCC enable the local regulators. Additionally the courts, voters and economic interests should be considered as enablers. This process of influence identification can be carried out on the micro and macro levels. It is vital to determine where and to whom your efforts are best directed. For instance, in the Seattle

cable refranchising where the city council must ultimately approve the franchise, the chair of the Utilities Committee is in an important role. However most of the renewal work is under the auspices of the Mayor's office with the Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

conducting research and preparing recommendations. As advocates, it is important to conduct such an analysis of structure as completely as possible, looking for players and potential points of entry.

Work to develop relationships with these enablers. Policy makers have to deal with many issues and do not have the time, or perhaps the interest, to go into detail. Establish your role as representative and expert in access. Don't forget to contact the advisory boards and talk to consultants. Consider becoming one. Stay in regular contact and monitor progress; the political landscape changes quickly. Don't make assumptions about information flow. We developed an initial set of recommendations for access and supporting material from other centers. We submitted this information to DAS. We also began working with the Citizens Cable Advisory Board, which is coordinated through DAS. We discovered at one meeting that neither the Cable Board nor the person in charge of refranchising for DAS had been notified of the information we had submitted.

It is important to know who has the best access to the policy maker (e.g. people in their district who have worked on campaigns). When you do develop your demands, package it in a way that can be communicated quickly to policy makers and influencers as well as to your potential supporters in community organizations.

Successful advocacy requires a well thought out campaign which includes a clear mission and structure, goals and an action plan. Aspects of this include research, public education, watch-dogging, fundraising, and the ability to respond to change.

On a more macro-electronic plane, access advocates

**We had complaints, we had experience, we were deeply concerned about public involvement. We also found that we couldn't talk about the future of access on cable without involving the larger spectrum of electronic communications!**

**Access centers have always provided a variety of under-recognized services under the auspices of television production. These include technology training, media literacy, multi-cultural education and more.**





face the challenge of determining where best to place our efforts and limited energy. There are many arenas of electronic communications that require protection or the development of public space. These range from state and federal regulation of telephone company entry into video, to the FCC auction of airwaves, to the cost of internet access and development of a community computer network. In the Puget Sound area, Microsoft and TCI have announced their intent to begin trials of their interactive software. Will local programming be available on demand? Will it be prominently displayed on the menu? Access advocates must plan for the increased range of electronic communications and the changing nature of how consumers interact with information.

The 1992 Cable Act allows cable operators to offer money for access equipment, while leaving access advocates with the task of securing ongoing operations funding from the franchise fees and other sources. While this is a tough task, the diversification of funding may be consistent with the expanding envelope of access. Access centers have always provided a variety of under-recognized services under the auspices of television produc-

tion. These include technology training, media literacy, multi-cultural education and more. Access centers are reaching deeper into some of these areas. Tualatin Valley Community Access, for instance, is developing a media literacy curriculum. Access expansion and valuable allies can also be found in a parallel forum, the computer-based access movement. There are groups such as Seattle Community Network that are advocating for public exchange and information networks [See CTR Cyberspace issue, Vol.16, No. 6]. Others such as the CLAMDYP Alliance in Seattle have allied to teach computer skills to youth. As with the rich diversity of cultures, technology diversity will also require a mediation of values.

It is easy to suffer from techno-wow syndrome. Our overall mission is to foster a public electronic trust and encourage community self-determination. To this end, the focus in refranchising right now is securing an ongoing infrastructure to support technology education, community dialogue, information availability and media literacy. Electra has focused on public participation in refranchising, improved facilities, system interactivity and community-based management of access facilities and policies which are currently under cable company control.

As you work to define your goals, involve others. Grab your binoculars, climb a tree and search out the public access constituency. Public access users, media advocates, artists and free speech law buffs are clear choices. We began developing a new access plan with a series of meetings at 911 Media Arts Center. Develop an action plan for outreach and make the contacts necessary to become a player in the political planning process. Tap into existing networks to educate and engage. The base constituency for public access is still the largest portion of our communities that don't get heard. Access provides an in-kind value to non-profit social service agencies, cultural groups, etc. Our task as advocates is to inform and motivate folks to take action. Develop your own

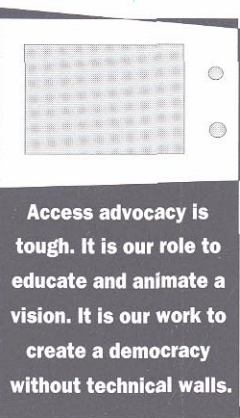
media as well as encourage visibility through others' newsletters, cable programs and education forums. Creating a presentation and developing a speakers' bureau is a great tool for getting the word out. Use the media to help raise the issues; this often involves educating the reporters. The need to disseminate information on the status of refranchising (or any advocacy work) cannot be understated. Be clear about any action you want from people. Provide clear information about

where to direct the action. For example, we put out a resolution for groups to sign and mail to the cable office.

We have also used public forums to bring participation to the policy makers. For instance, we gathered together key city, county and state legislators and staff for a discussion on public interest in regulating new technologies. We co-sponsored this event with the 911 Media Arts Center and Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility. We have also called for public hearings and helped publicize them. Community needs assessment is now a required element of refranchising. Access advocates have an important role to play in overseeing community information gathering and discussion.

There is more impetus on the part of policy-makers to create advanced technical systems for government and even education use. Certainly the profit makers have their vision. Access advocacy is tough. It is our role to educate and animate a vision. It is our work to create a democracy without technical walls.

Currently in Seattle, David Keyes pays the rent working for a company producing educational programs for the Seattle Public Schools and moonlights as the chairman of Electra, a coalition for Electronic Democracy. David is a former Midwest regional chair for the former NFLCP.



**Access advocacy is tough. It is our role to educate and animate a vision. It is our work to create a democracy without technical walls.**

## An Activist Bookshelf

**Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max, *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*. Washington: Seven Locks Press, 1991.**

**Tony Dowmunt, *Channels of Resistance: Global Television and Local Empowerment*. London: British Film Institute, 1993.**

**John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in the Appalachian Valley*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980**

**Mark O'Brien and Craig Little, eds., *Reimaging America: The Arts of Social Change*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990.**

**Paper Tiger, *Roar! Paper Tiger Guide to Media Activism*. New York: Paper Tiger Television, 1992.**

**Peter Park, Mary Brydon-Miller, Budd Hall, and Ted Jackson, *Voices of Change: Participatory Research in the United States and Canada*. Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1993.**

**Charlotte Ryan, *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*. Boston: South End Press, 1991.**

**Nancy Thede, and Alain Ambrosi, editors, *Video: The Changing World*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992**

**Peter Steven, *Brink of Reality: New Canadian Documentary Film and Video*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993.**

**Alvin Zander, *Effective Social Action by Community Groups*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1990.**





# 'Shooting' Sacred Cows in the Himalayas

*Ratna Cable TV is magic for the viewers, many of whom have never seen a television before, in an area where the town crier can still be heard.*

By Peter Lowe

Every Saturday afternoon the Himalayan hill people of Tansen turn their backs on some of the world's most spectacular mountain scenery to watch a television program shot in their neighbour's spare bedroom.

Somehow the Ratna Cable TV group has pumped out two hours of home-made community television every week in a remote rural area of Nepal for the last year with a battered Hitachi VKC camera, two home video recorders, a huge Philips spotlight and a rusty video light.

The portable video recorder broke down ages ago. That's when the production team decided to start broadcasting their local news and current affairs program from the spare bedroom in the basement.

The acoustics are terrible, and the green local news reader sometimes sounds like he's speaking through a tin can on a string instead of a microphone, but its magic for the viewers, many of whom have never seen a television before, in an area where the town crier can still be heard.

This station is the best community television station in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal. In fact, it is the only television station in the kingdom, apart from the state-owned Nepal Television (NTV), which doesn't reach Tansen anyway.

Ratna Cable TV started broadcasting just over a year ago when a group of friends who'd been recording pop music adaptation of traditional Nepalese folk songs for years decided to try something different. How this group got started, inspired by Beatles records brought home to the Himalayan Hills from Britain by Gurkha soldiers, is another story!

Radio technician Buddha Ratna Shakya and his son Mahesh figured out how to build an adaptor so they could broadcast direct from the VCR under their television in the living room. They plugged the adaptor into the local cable network they'd already set up so their neighbors could receive Star Television from Hong Kong via the satellite dish on the Shakya's roof.

Then local high school principal Madan Deurale produced the first of the many programs the Ratna Cable TV group has put to air for 62 consecutive weeks. The first program was about one of Tansen's most important events: the local Sacred Cow festival.

"We took the camera and VCR deck to our shop in the market and filmed the procession from a stool, holding the camera over the heads of the crowd. We didn't have a tripod so I got sore arms, and camera shake was a problem, but there was a great response from the viewers because nobody had ever made such a program before," Mahesh said.

Since then the group has also made programs about education, environmental problems, tourism, cultural performances, women, academics, and local dignitaries. Everything except politics. "We stay out of politics," Producer Deurale insisted. "If we give a program about one political party then we will be pressured to give a program about all the other political parties and we don't have time to make programs about anything else."

Deurale estimates 1,000 to 1,500 viewers watch Ratna Cable TV's

weekly program on about 150 television sets, an average of about 10 viewers per box. "Usually the whole family and all their neighbours watch the program, and in some houses up to thirty people are watching," he said.

He doesn't count the growing number of "illegal" viewers who tune in by tapping the cable lines, disturbing the picture on many legal viewers sets. But such minor problems are easy to solve compared to the problems of trying to deal with one of the world's most backward government bureaucracies.

"To broadcast our programs we should have a license from the government, but there are no rules and regulations about how to obtain such a licence, and it's difficult to find out who to talk to about this," Deurale said.

Television's ability to engage a widespread and illiterate audience makes it an ideal medium for creating awareness among people in remote areas about health, education, sanitation, and other aspects of rural development. This is particularly true in the Palpa district of Nepal where Tansen is located; the spectacular mountainous terrain restricts the possibilities for other forms of development communication such as village visits and local newspaper distribution.

Realizing this, the Ratna Cable TV group have formed a community non-profit organization, Communication for Development Palpa (CDP), to further their aim of facilitating local development via the electronic media. CDP has five objectives.

- Make people aware of local and national development programs and help to increase their participation in those programs.
- Create mass awareness in the field of environmental conservation, education, health and skill-development.
- To create awareness among people to strengthen democracy.
- Help to preserve and improve national cultural heritage.
- To prepare audio and visual programs for the development of women and children.

**Television's ability to engage a widespread and illiterate audience makes it an ideal medium for creating awareness among people in remote areas about health, education, sanitation, and other aspects of rural development.**

CDP has already produced special video cassettes on culture, sanitation and cleanliness. The organization also broadcast a pilot medium-wave local radio program for four days during a District Industrial Exhibition in

Tansen. But the group's ability to produce quality community television is restricted by lack of equipment.

How would you make an interesting program about how an adult literacy class has improved the lives of women in a Himalayan village, without a portable camera?

Every Thursday night Madan Deurale and Mahesh Deurale meet to discuss what the Saturday program should be about. Madan said: "I am the production department. He is the technical department. We sit in the living room and decide what we will do."

This week there is a competition for cultural groups from local

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# Training for Social Activism

By Bob Devine

The echoes of the commercial system of broadcast television are abundant in public access training, in our literature, and in our professional conferences and meetings. In attempting to build an alternative community communications system we often pass along the codes and conventions of the dominant media without much critical scrutiny. Access training, John Higgins has noted, is sometimes a "nightmare" of broadcast cloning (Higgins, 1991a). Higgins joins a number of other media theoreticians in pointing out that the forms, structures and codes of mainstream media are not ideologically neutral, that the selection, ordering and representation of images and ideas involve a value-laden process of structuring the reality of the viewer.

A number of access centers are beginning to integrate media literacy into training programs. In a recent issue of CMR, Fred Johnson (Johnson, 1994) calls for "infusing media literacy principles throughout the production we undertake and the training programs we design," while Jessika Maria Ross, Greg Boozell, Roberto Arévalo and others provide some insight into how such a fundamental shift in the orientation of access training is being accomplished. I would like to suggest that the focus and structure of access training can extend and enhance these efforts to develop critical viewing skills, and that by using a critical social agenda as organizing principle of training, the training experience can encourage social activism and agency.

## **Question #1: What are we training for? What outcomes do we desire?**

At a very basic level, access training seeks to impart sufficient *technical skill* in the use of media tools to allow the trainees to become effective communicators. Given the goal of producing programming, the training focuses on those components, characteristics, connections and systems that allow the trainee to become operational, as well as the sort of care and handling that will preserve the equipment being used. A corollary focus of much training is on bringing trainees to a level of *technical quality* that will be competitive in the multi-channel environment of cable. Technical expertise has been invoked on many occasions to suggest that audiences be protected from the technical blunders of novice speakers by professionals who speak for those seeking voice. It is no wonder that building technical skill is a central focus of most training.

Several difficulties quickly become obvious to most access trainers. The first is that the technology used by public access operations is not often on a par with the levels of technical quality and sophistication that are in evidence across the cable menu. When technical competence is used as a standard for entry into

the arena of public discourse, the effect is to disenfranchise those speakers with limited access to resources and training. Access organizations have as part of their mission the lowering of the thresholds of expertise necessary to enter the marketplace of ideas. Continuing improvement in the effectiveness of speech is a goal of most training and support programs, but hopefully the training effort extends beyond technical competence of the message to include considerations of the engagement of the participation of the community, and interaction around the messages.

The second is that the skill levels of trainees do not often reach the level of technical mastery, quality and consistency that is currency in the commercial arena. Some achieve success, but many trainees remain marginal in terms of technical ability. And so we aspire to impart a level of technical proficiency and quality that are not always possible given the limitations of time and resources and the high demand for access experienced by many access centers. Operating the apparatus is at the center of our training efforts, even though this dimension is only a part of the production process; trainees also need a clear theoretical understanding of content, a knowledge of audience, a knowledge of how the medium works, how it is used, and some specific ideas of social outcomes that their effort might have (Tomaselli, 1982).

A second set of goals for access training has to do with *production value*. The argument is that if programming is not at a level of production value and slickness, audiences will not watch it. The difficulties in taking the standard codes and conventions too seriously, of course, are that media aesthetics often involve a sort of self-defined professionalism that reflects (a) the economic organization of the industry and the efficiencies of mass production and distribution, (b) the cultural position of media producers themselves, and (c) the techniques, procedures, conventions and codes of representation which support (a) and (b).

The origins and orientation of such representational practices are not always apparent, but the conventions themselves are sufficiently widespread to be taken for granted as universal and immutable. On occasion we may notice that a practice that was, in the past, considered a failing will find its way into the representational language of commercial production; the jump-cut, and violations of the 180° axis of interest, for example, were absorbed into "professional" representational practice some time after the widespread distribution of French New Wave films in the United States, while the use of hand-held camera and high-grain images has crept into the lexicon of commercial representation as a marker for authenticity<sup>1</sup>.



**"A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. In this way, the presence of the oppressed in the struggle for their liberation will be what it should be: not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement."**

**— Paolo Freire,  
Pedagogy of the  
Oppressed**

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**"The relationship of non-participation to non-consciousness of deprived groups is developed by Paolo Freire, one of the few writers to have considered the topic in depth. 'Consciousness', he writes, 'is constituted in the dialectic of man's objectification and action upon the world.' In situations of highly unequal power relationships, which he terms 'closed societies', the powerless are highly dependent. They are prevented from either self-determined action or reflection upon their actions. Denied this dialectical process, and denied the democratic experience out of which the 'critical consciousness' grows, they develop a 'culture of silence'. The dependent society is by definition a silent society.' The culture of silence may preclude the development of consciousness amongst the powerless, thus lending to the dominant order an air of legitimacy."**

**— John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in the Appalachian Village*.**

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On occasion we may find that representations originating with other cultures utilize codes and conventions that are at variance with those with which we are accustomed. The manner in which people select, compose, order and present images and sounds is influenced by culture and experience (Higgins, 1991a), and reflects a particular cultural position<sup>2</sup>, and the manner in which considerations of composition (space, context, framing, weighting of the screen, proximity etc.), sequence (juxtaposition, duration, pause, rhythm, continuity, causality, etc.) and voice (first or third person, self-reflexivity, narration, etc.) are handled may not conform to the "professional" standards of western commercial media<sup>3</sup>. When we use such conventions as the organizing structure of training, we are subtly encouraging our trainers to turn out broadcast clones. The emphasis on using production value to attract an audience assumes that *distribution* is more important than *interaction*, and that the *quantity of audience* will be more significant than the quality of *viewer engagement*.

I think that most of us secretly hope that the hours and energy we invest in training will produce "*significant*" programming. Questions of *what is significant* and *to whom* do not receive the analysis they deserve, and often the "significance" of programming betrays our own tastes and speaks from our own particular cultural position. It is relatively easy to muster enthusiasm for supporting "high culture" and socially relevant programming which confirms some of the values that we have as access workers, but in training for diversity of expression, it is often difficult to assess the significance of communicative intents. The First Amendment protects the minority perspective; a training curriculum which attempts to shape minority perspectives (whether ethnic, cultural, political, geographic, etc.) to conform to the "majority" (i.e. the conventions, aesthetics, stylistics, genres and forms of broadcast television) is headed in the wrong direction.

There are several overarching goals/outcomes of public access training that seem to me to provide a broader and more meaningful context for the development of technical skills, production values and significant programming. They have to do with the social relationships that are engendered by the training process itself, and the manner in which those relationships focus trainees upon connecting with the cultural, social, economic and political realities beyond the studio or access center.

The first of these, of course, is *critical literacy*. If the trainee is encouraged to develop a critique of mainstream media in tandem with learning how to manipulate symbols, think counter-factually, and construct expressive or persuasive media messages, there is a great likelihood that they will move beyond *technical skill* to *literacy* — from simple understanding to critical comprehension. A second goal/out-

come has to do with the social nature of most training programs. The trainer can build upon the social interactions and processes of the training (as well as the follow-up production activities) to move trainees from *collaboration* to *association*, from association to *collective effort*, and from collective effort to *forging coalitions* that extend beyond the actual access activity. I have contended elsewhere that the sort of evolution of social relationships engendered by access training is as important as the programs that are produced. Such relationships provide for socialization (often across differences), for networking, and ultimately, for organizing around issues (Devine, 1992). A third goal/outcome of access training involves *bringing private citizens into public life*. Access training can build upon the social nature of the endeavor to emphasize the social context of communication, their role in the marketplace of ideas, and the ways in which they can become involved and empowered within their communities. A fourth goal/outcome derives from the first three, and it has to do with providing the trainee with the confidence to act, to enter the public discourse and to participate in the forging of public opinion, both within the access setting and beyond it. In short, the access training can build the *agency* of the trainees.

## **Question #2: What are the qualities of a meaningful training experience?**

There are a number of qualitative dimensions of the training experience that need particular attention in the low-contact/scarse-resource environment of public access. The characteristics of good experiential learning — whether in the classroom, in the field, or in another culture — are those that distinguish active learning from detached observation. Some of the characteristics that might help to structure the training experience are as follows:

► **That it require risk.** The training should involve exercises that put people into encounter with other cultures, sub-cultures, peoples, situations or environments which are significantly different from their own. The outcomes of exercises may not be predictable, and the trainee may be revealed as a novice, or less than "in control".

● **That it requires investment.** Trainees should have a sense of personal commitment, attachment, involvement or ownership in the training experience, and should share some sense of caring about the outcomes. The implication is, of course, that the training is relevant to the experience, the life and the world view of the trainee.

► **That it challenge assumptions.** The training experience should cause the trainee to examine current understandings and categories of knowledge, should challenge current frames of reference, and should cause some reflection on how the trainee comes to know something.

► **That it engenders interaction.** Access training is active, by definition, and most often involves social relationships. A quality training experience should



focus the attention of trainees on the manner in which the training group negotiates a means of exchange, common language, roles and codes, and the manner in which often diverse individuals forge common understandings and common goals. The training relationship should position the trainee as a “sendceiver” — someone who interacts as both a sender and a receiver of information.

➤ **That it involves an element of reflection.** The power of experiential learning is in the interaction of experience and subsequent reflection on that experience. The training experience should provide trainees with the space and support to make personal meaning. It goes without saying that the extension of media literacy understandings into the training experience is involved in connecting theory with practice.

➤ **That it leads to agency.** Training should be focused on enabling the trainee to act in spite of constraints, to initiate their own work, to work autonomously and with confidence and self-sufficiency, and to have concrete outcomes in their everyday world. Training should bring participants to voice in speaking their history and their culture and give them confidence in articulating their grievances and entering into the public discourse of the community.

### Question #3: How can we do that?

Those working on media literacy are developing a wonderful array of materials, exercises and approaches that can be incorporated into access training (see for example the article by jessikah maria ross in CMR Vol. 17, No. 1). I would like to suggest a handful of problem-solving exercises that can be used as a hands-on part of the training process (a) to focus attention on the social dimensions of communication, (b) to attach production to the social, economic and political realities of those being trained, (c) to insert the trainees into the arena of public and civic participation, (d) to encourage collaboration and coalition-building, and (e) to encourage an activist approach to the use of the access opportunity.

➤ **Self Portrait.** Have trainees construct a 5-shot self portrait to share with fellow trainees. Screen and discuss the processes of representation (how I would represent myself as opposed to how others might [mis]represent me), of interpretation (how others make meaning out of the five shots I have chosen to share), and objectification (what it feels like to have others view, discuss and interpret you as an “object”). Build the discussion toward how the understandings that come out of this “sharing” process might inform various access projects that the trainees undertake.

● **Oral History.** Have trainees do an oral history interview dealing with the history of their neighborhood. Screen and discuss the process of interviewing, the social and cultural geography of

everyday experience, the richness of storytelling and personal recollection, and the differences in the way a resident might treat this history versus the manner in which mainstream media might try to tell the same story. Other variations having to do with social heritage might include constructing a letter to the next generation, or demonstrating a distinct cultural practice.

● **Analysis of a Community Issue.** Have the training group select a community issue or difficulty with which people have some familiarity (using the front page of the newspaper might be a good starting point). Do a group pre-production planning session for a program on this issue. Identify as many aspects of the issue as possible, identify who the key voices are, who could address the issue and the sorts of questions that might be asked of them, analyze what sorts of visual images or visual metaphors might be used in explaining or presenting the issue. If possible have various members of the training group do practice shoots on some of the key voices or images that have been discussed in the planning. A variation that also gets at surveillance of the environment and analysis of issues might involve sending one training group to interview municipal officials about an issue while sending another training group to document the realities of the issue; a comparison of the two efforts will generate a similar kind of critical issue discussion.

● **Analysis of an Interaction.** Select an observable kind of interaction that is accessible to the training group (i.e. a restaurant worker or clerk waiting on customers, a librarian checking out books, a grocery store worker ringing up purchases, a teacher conducting a class, etc.). Discuss the dynamics of the interaction and various ways that it might be documented. Have the training group try one of the approaches. Screen the results and discuss how another approach might have been used to change or reverse the “balance of power” in the interaction.

● **Addressing Social Issues: Intolerance.** Send teams of trainees out on the street for hands-on experience with interviewing. The interview will be on the subject of intolerance. Interviewers will ask people: (a) When, where, how they have experienced intolerance; and (b) What they themselves are intolerant of. Screen and discuss how one negotiates a common base for bridging difference, how one differentiates the experience of intolerance from being intolerant, and how people come to tolerate difference.

● **Addressing Social Issues: Power.** Send teams of trainees on an interview exercise to a hotel or restaurant. The interview will be on the subject of power. Interviewers will ask a guest and an employee how they experience and exercise power. Screen and discuss the differences between the responses of guests and those of employees



**“Most people do not accumulate a body of experience. Most people go through life undergoing a series of happenings, which pass through their systems undigested. Happenings become experiences when they are digested, when they are reflected on, related to general patterns and synthesized.”**

– Saul Alinski,  
*Rules for Radicals*

**“Our courses do not assume technology as an autonomous and neutral product. It is inextricably bound with productive forces and itself suggests the creation and perpetuation of various techniques and conventions. . . and the reproduction through genre, style, convention and aesthetics of the status quo.”**

– Keyan Tomaselli, “The Teaching of Film and Television Production in a Third World Context: The Case of South Africa”

**“Their experience with video, conceiving, shooting, editing and presenting their own programs, made the citizens particularly aware of the myth of objectivity in mass media reporting, and sensitive to conscious and unconscious manipulation. They became a less gullible public.”**

– Dorothy Todd Henaut,  
*“Video Stories from the Dawn of Time”*

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and the implications for understanding the power relationships that take place in that kind of a setting. Discuss ways in which power is exercised (coercive, consensual, structural, subtextual, etc.), what forms of power people have, and who has access to the systems of power. Discuss ways in which trainees might use access opportunities to empower others.

### ● Addressing Social Issues: Difference.

Send teams of trainees on an interview exercise to talk with people that they might never think to talk to (from a different cultural orientation, a senior citizen, a 5th grader, someone from a different part of town, etc.). As part of the exercise, instruct trainees to talk with the person being interviewed for a sufficient time before the cameras roll to identify a common area of interest, a common experience, or a common point of reference. The interview will be on that shared interest. Screen and discuss the process by which the interviewees came to find "common ground", the difficulties in doing so, and those elements of the interaction that aided or hindered this effort.

There are, of course, hundreds of variations on these themes and strategies. The point is that access training be redirected in such a way that it involves social as well as technical learning, that it is not just for autonomy of expression, but relates somehow to the public good, that it is tied back to and integrated with the community that it serves, and that the training sets up a "culture of access" that values voice, the practice of culture, collectivized action, agency and social outcomes.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>It is interesting to note that the characteristics of "amateur" production that Garnham (1990) objects to in his discussion of video are the very characteristics that are used to locate jeans, motor scooters, beer and music in an oppositional position in mainstream American advertising.

<sup>2</sup>Ruby (1991) wrestles with the authenticity of the sort of collaboration evidenced in works such as the Navajo films of Worth and Adair, the ethnographic films of Jean Rouch, and the various efforts of Canada's Challenge for Change program, and rejects shared authority as a model because the mechanics of collaboration and the technical, intellectual and cultural parity have not been sufficiently documented. Nevertheless, as Worth and Adair (1975), Higgins (1991b), Tomaselli (1982) and others note, the aesthetics of media representation are culturally grounded.

<sup>3</sup>Zettl's (1990) work on applied media aesthetics provides a comprehensive discussion of the conventions and codes of western media representation. Zettl presents a psycho-physical argument for some dimensions of the particular aesthetic system he describes. He points out that the asymmetry of the screen, the reading of figure ground relationships, dominant and subsidiary contrast, the perception of "continuity" and the reading of balance within the frame can, in part, be attributed to mechanisms of foveal attention. The cultural framework for foveal attention involved in reading, however, seems to suggest that the "reading" of images is informed by cultural considerations.

## Shooting Sacred Cows

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schools, so the winning group is invited to perform in front of the camera on Buddha Ratna Shakya's roof. It's a bit squashed, and the musicians are barely audible in the background, but the slot gets taped.

Friday afternoon hostess Anjou Rayamajhi arrives in a sari with a red thika on her forehead to record the program lead-in. News reader Bharat Sharma appears with his script printed in block letters on A4 paper (teleprompters are as rare in this part of the Himalayas as submarine sandwiches). The headlines: A report from the Jaycees convention, an interview with the local chairman of Amnesty International, the winners of the cultural group competition, an interview with a doctor, and yesterday's weather. . . All the local news that's fit to broadcast. The program is taking shape.

Mahesh usually starts his editing vigil after sunset on Friday night, carefully setting up each edit on the two VCR's before making a running edit by releasing the pause button at just the right moment. His concentration is intense, there is no second chance if the timing is wrong, and this week he makes the last edit at three o'clock in the morning. The grunt work is over.

The telephone is ringing off the wall because the program is five minutes late, the cable from the VCR recorder is acting up again. When is *our* program coming, the viewers want to know.

Now the tape is being slipped into the deck, the play button is being punched, and Ratna Cable TV is on the air: "Namaste, we welcome you again..." It doesn't seem to matter that the color bars are just painted on a sheet of paper.

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### Notes off the Net

As CMR went to press, word was that Sen. Inouye (HI) was about to introduce a new bill in Congress to set aside "reserve capacity on the National Information Infrastructure (NII) for use by non-profit or public institutions [including NGOs, schools, local government, civic organizations, etc.] at little or not cost." The bill was expected to be "married to" Holling's S1822, the Senate counterpart to the Markey/Fields HR3636.



# Lessons from Vancouver Cooperative Radio

By Dorothy Kidd

It may seem strange that I have chosen to write about Canadian radio history for this special issue addressed to community cable advocates. I have been working in grassroots media in Canada for the last twenty-five years, including community cable and independent video production. However, since 1980, most of my involvement has been at Vancouver Cooperative Radio. I decided to challenge some of the boundaries of thinking about media activism by crossing over both the borders of nation state and of technology.

While radio might seem passe in these heady days of the convergences of new media, I am concerned about the fact that so many of the debates about electronic democracy echo similar discussions at the time of the introduction of radio. The battle in the 1930s in this country for control over the first national electronic highway featured many of the same actors we see today — the corporate sectors versus a coalition of nationalist liberals, social democrats and social movements.

By sweeping through some of this history, I want to raise questions about how far we have come in an alternative media vision. Specifically, I want to ask whether the alternative represents a real break from the private commercial and state-controlled public models of broadcasting, or whether it has in fact been framed within the political and economic definitions of the market and government institutions.

As I began to review the work of earlier radio activists, I also began to question whether the alternative vision is getting narrower. The radio activists of my parents generation fought for control of the whole national system; while in the late 1960s and 1970s, members of my own generation fought for one community radio station (or cable TV channel). Today community radio stations have been backed into such a corner that we have sometimes had to fight for one program, or in some cases one song.

## Public Broadcasting — the Beginnings

While many of the first experiments were conducted in Canada, radio became a mass phenomenon when Canadians in southern cities began to tune in the cross-border signals from US stations, and soon after the same format and style of programming from a small number of Canadian clones. The emerging Canadian private stations basically repeated the US signals: directed to urban markets, they had little desire to develop independent networks that reached beyond the southern cities. While the federal government was supportive of free-enterprise, they felt obliged (just as they had with the extension of the railroad and would with most succeeding communications technologies) to assist in the development of the technological infrastructure in order to extend



Louise Ettling and Dorothy Kidd in Control Room "A" at Vancouver Cooperative Radio, 1987.

their sovereignty nation-wide. By the end of the 1920 the government opened a national debate about how to create the infrastructure and administration for a national broadcasting system.

On one side was the corporate sector, led by the Canadian Manufacturers Association whose members included some larger Canadian companies, many of whom were controlled by their US parents; several large private radio stations; four of the major newspapers; and the Canadian Pacific Railway (which was one of the first broadcasters and today is a partner with Rogers Cable in Unitel, the telecommunications company). The coalition was primarily retail-oriented: they lobbied for a privately controlled system that would advertise their goods.

This period of the early 1930s, was one of the intense organizing and massive mobilization by both the Communist Party and the social democratic left. The Canadian Radio League, which represented the other side of the radio debate, was a board alliance of nationalists, liberals and social democratic groups, including several newspapers, trade unions, farmers, organized women, progressive churches, artists, critics, and educators from both English Canada and Quebec. Their common aim was to counter the commercial and cultural influences of the large monopoly controlled American networks such as CBS and NBC: and they promoted the idea that radio was a public resource that should represent the widest range of national public interests. Their strategic choice, as stated by one of their chief spokespeople, Graham Spry, was between "the state or the United States". A national, fully funded service, Spry felt, was the only guarantee of freedom of expression of all classes, an in particular those represented by the social movements within the coalition.

The result of this debate was a compromise: parlia-



**While radio might seem passe in these heady days of the convergences of new media, I am concerned about the fact that so many of the debates about electronic democracy echo similar discussions at the time of the introduction of radio.**

**... I want to ask whether the alternative represents a real break from the private commercial and state-controlled public models of broadcasting, or whether it has in fact been framed within the political and economic definitions of the market and government institutions.**

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**The forums demonstrated the radical potential of broadcasting media: they promoted the ideals of the "two-way" communication and participatory democracy, involving thousands of people across the country in discussing and organizing around important political, economic and social issues.**

**Middle class social activists and cultural workers, their base was in the next generation of social movements: groups organizing around the environment, peace and women's issues, urban development, aboriginal issues, and trade unions.**

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ment enacted a broadcasting law establishing a national system to be led by a public institution. Eventually called the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) it would not only produce programming in the public interest, but would also regulate both the private stations and itself. However, by 1935, Graham Spry had admitted defeat, describing the CBC as an instrument for subsidy of private enterprise, a creature of the party in power and a challenge to the freedom of the air (Raboy, 1990). The CBC very quickly became secondary to the commercial stations — due to lack of a strong public funding base, it was forced to compete with the commercial stations for advertising revenue and negotiate with them to distribute CBC programming. It was also vulnerable to their lobby's influence with the federal governing parties.

Instead of providing the full access to minority voices that Spry had envisaged, the CBC service became highly centralized and bureaucratic. Programming was primarily one-way, produced by professionals who interpreted the "public" interest in their own upper-middle class — and primarily English male — voice. "Public" came to mean less the involvement and consultation of interested groups and/or listeners on public issues, and more a sanction for state intervention, indirectly in the selection and framing of issues, or directly in the production of propaganda such as during World War II (Raboy, 1990). However, the Radio League had wedged a wide enough opening in the public radio discourse that two notable experiments in participatory programming were carried out in the 1940s and the 1950s.

### **The Radio Forums**

One group of activists in the Canadian Radio League were adult educators, organized in the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE). Influenced by American social critic John Dewey, they thought of communications as transformative: fully engaged citizens could use the new medium in an active dialogue to reflect and transform the relations between them. The CAAE brought together mass organizations, voluntary associations and urban middle class activists in two radio forums.

The first and most famous, *Farm Radio Forum*, was jointly conceived with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to deal with economic, social and educational problems of farm people in the 1940s and 1950s. They broadcast to an organized audience of about 30,000, who met weekly in groups of 10 to 20 to listen to broadcasts, discuss their contents and then forward suggestions to the broadcasters for future programs. The radio program was part of the CAAE's wider conception of social democratic organizing in which the program was only the catalyst for the evening's discussion of political, economic and social issues, and planning of listener "action projects" (Raboy, 1990).

*Farm Radio Forum*, and the later urban version, *Citizen's Forum*, were among the most popular Canadian public affairs programs of the period. They challenged the status quo through their promotion of left of center ideas such as full employment and economic development through co-operatives and credit unions. Both programs encountered consistent objections from business groups and conservative politicians about "left-wing ideas" and their philosophical connections to the social democratic party, the Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF, the precursor to the NDP). In response, program staff and their supporters cited the right to use the air waves for discussion of public issues and the need for an autonomous public media.

The radio forums ran until the end of the 1950s and the beginning of a very different communications environment. The CBC was by then devoting most of its programming funds and creative personnel to the new medium of television. But their legacy is still relevant for media activists today. The forums demonstrated the radical potential of broadcasting media: they promoted the ideals of the "two-way" communication and participatory democracy, involving thousands of people across the country in discussing and organizing around important political, economic and social issues. (Since then *Farm Radio Forum*, has been used as a model for radio listening groups in India, Africa and other countries of the south).

I also think community radio and other media activists can learn from their failure. The radio forums were limited both by their institutional incorporation within the CBC and by their liberal pluralist conception of advocacy. Canadian adult educator Ron Faris attributes the end of the forums "to the decline of the social movements after the War and to the fact that unlike the *Farm Forum*, the *Citizen's Forum* did not encourage listener "action projects" (Raboy, 1990).

*Since political and economic constraints on both sponsoring organizations (CAAE and CBC) prevented the development of clearly radical programming or associated action projects, no possibility of sustaining a social movement existed. Thus, the forum was viewed not as a goad to group social action, but, rather, as a means of personal enlightenment which might or might not lead to personal action.* (Faris, cited in Raboy, 1990).

The forums were the last time public interest groups were ever directly involved in programming "except in a strictly advisory capacity" (Raboy, 1990, 77).

### **Vancouver Co-operative Radio**

The Muckrakers and Neighborhood Radio received the first Vancouver Co-operative Radio (Co-op Radio) license in 1975. Middle class social activists and cultural workers, their base was in the next generation of social movements: groups organizing around the environment, peace and women's issues, urban development, aboriginal issues, and trade



unions.

Their initial conception was also broadly educational: the radio service would broadcast public discussions of social, political and economic issues. However, unlike the forums, who used radio only as an instrument to bring issues to groups of listeners organized in the community, Co-op Radio would bring issues from organized groups to the airwaves. During that period, public meetings and commission hearings were important fulcrums of organizing, and the plan was to broadcast them, supplemented with programs of news, views and interviews.

The Co-op Radio pioneers saw their work as an alternative to both main streams —

public (CBC) and private commercial broadcasting. Unlike Spry and the Radio League, they did not choose between "the state or the United States." Instead they applied for a license for a local and regional service on the margins of the country and the communications system. While the rationale for commercial stations was to deliver a "mass" audience to advertisers, Co-op Radio argued for "special casting," programming by and for the large number of groups who had little access to mainstream stations. There would be no commercials but Co-op Radio would be funded through annual groups and individual memberships.

Many of the charter members were and are still active in public debates about the media. In hindsight, though, I wonder whether their community radio idea represented a retreat from the earlier vision of a national alternative, to what has become a more vulnerable marginal position. At the time, their local orientation met with little opposition from the governing Liberal Party or from corporate radio. Since then, there have been several dramatic shifts in the media and political environments, whose conjuncture have affected the station significantly.

### A New Generation of Programmers

By the 1980s, when I started working at Co-op Radio, there had been a significant decline in profit for most Canadian commercial AM and many FM stations as advertising dollars went to television or back south with their US parent companies. One of the responses of private broadcasters was to lobby for deregulation from the Canadian Radio Television-telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Their efforts were boosted when the Conservative Party came to power in 1984 and by the end of the decade,



Vancouver City Councillor Libby Davies at Vancouver's Marathon Kick-off.

programmers, and another new generation of social movements: those of us who are lesbian or gay, solidarity groups from the Latin American, Irish and Palestinian communities and most recently younger activists from women and men of color. There has also been a radicalizing of form and content of programming, amidst a much more conservative mainstream media and overall political climate. The inevitable clash has, however, not been very public, but within the office of the government regulator, the CRTC.

There has been an increasing number of skirmishes over programming content, especially in the last five years. Whether — for example, between Palestinian programmers and members of the Canadian Jewish Congress; lesbian and gay programmers and fundamentalist Christian groups; within communities; or over the sexism of language used in words and music — these cases underline serious political conflicts within the wider society.

However, the CRTC has regarded them punitively, as conditions for withdrawing our radio license. While commercial radio regulations have been reduced, the demands on community stations have increased and volunteer stations like ours have had to devote the all-too-scarce energy to maintaining diplomacy with the CRTC. These battles have become critical for the survival of the stations themselves and also remind us that the Canadian state will intervene when groups begin to threaten the status quo.

### The Programming Legacy

These incidents show the boundaries of what is tolerable in the "public" discourse. Yet, I want to widen the frame beyond the right to advocate alternative

programming regulations for commercial stations had been reduced. The only real continuing requirement is that they broadcast a minimum of 30 percent Canadian music.

There has not been the same concern for the community radio sector. During the 1980s, many student-run stations expanded their mandates and applied for community FM licenses, forming a loose national network called the National Campus and Community Radio Association (NCRA) with Co-op Radio. (No longer is Co-op Radio the only community-oriented station outside of Quebec.)

This growth can be accounted for in part by the changing composition of the

## Guides to Activist Film and Video from Media Network

39 West 14th street  
Suite 403  
New York, NY 10011  
(212) 929-2663

► **Media Network, A Reality Check on the American Dream: The Guide to Anti-Poverty film and video.** New York: Media Network, 1991.

► **Media Network, Bombs Aren't Cool: A guide to over 100 of the best films and videos on Peace, Militarism and Disarmament.** New York: Media Network, 1988.

► **Media Network, In Her Own Image: Films and Videos Empowering Women for the Future.** New York: Media Network, 1991.

► **Media Network, Seeing Through Aids.** New York: Media Network, 1990.

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## Publications on Radio

- **Bruce Girard, ed., *A Passion for Radio*. Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992.**

A collection of articles from AMARC dealing with community radio and its relationship to culture and development and the issues involved in organizing, starting and operating a community station.

Black Rose Books  
340 Nagel Drive  
Cheektowaga, New York 14225

- **Radio Resistor's Bulletin**  
P.O. Box 3038  
Bellingham, Washington 98227-3038

Articles on community and micro-radio, and activism involved with putting the public back in public radio.

- **Reclaiming the Airwaves**  
Free Radio Berkely  
Free Communications Coalition  
1442 A Walnut Street, #406  
Berkeley, California 94709
- Micro-radio, court cases, and activism both domestic and international around issues preserving the airwaves as a medium of public communication.

- **Inter radio**  
Published by AMARC  
(World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters)  
3575 Boul. St. Laurent, #704  
Montreal, Quebec  
H2X 2T7 Canada

A newsletter devoted to community radio. Features news profiles of radio projects, technical tips, reviews and information about AMARC activities.

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and controversial views: is alternative radio using the full communicational and educational potential of the medium for social change? Just as the radio forums before, the programs are seldom being seized by social movements as their own. In practice, the link to different groups and organizations was and is mediated by a corps of volunteer programmers who do not draw on the participatory educational model of the radio forums.

At first, programmers drew on another legacy — CBC public affairs. Sometimes they were one and the same people; mostly but not exclusively, white and male, usually from liberal arts backgrounds, they produced well-researched documentaries. And at the Co-op Radio station, producers could be more up front about their left of center politics. As "critical witnesses", they would broadcast information not heard on the CBC or other stations, gathering the "silenced" voices and views, and uncovering the hidden context behind mainstream stories and life.

Originally drawing from the women's movement but now much more generalized, more recent programmers such as myself and others have refined another idea, that of "self-representation": those involved in a particular issue or community know best how to present their own stories. While the earlier programmers often assumed they were speaking to a general audience, many now speak much more self-consciously from their subject positions as marginalized people, to address listeners they assume are members of their community.

Many programmers encourage interaction with their listeners via phone-in shows, open houses, and participation by programmers at public events of all kinds. However, most of their energy is directed to weekly program production. While they may rely on community-based organizations for program content, there has been little effort beyond these institutional links to develop more interactive relationships with listeners, to explore how they listen and interpret the programming in the context of their daily lives.

Too often, both of these models have resulted in a one-way flow of communications from programmer to individual listener, not that different from the dominant mainstream model. Too often the medium has been one of reaction, where programmers speak from a different political or subject position, but still use the same talking-down style of address as the dominant commercial or state-operated media. At the last World Community Radio (AMARC) conference, many of the other community radios in North

America, Europe and Latin America also identified this as a problem and a challenge and have been working on changing it.

### Some Final Questions

Way back in 1980, Co-op Radio co-founder Liora Salter criticized the way that democratic participation was only being evaluated by examining the process of program production (Salter, 1980). It is still too often the case that the success of a project such as ours at Vancouver Co-operative Radio is evaluated simply in terms of the number and multiplicity of new social subjects that have access to the medium. Is this not just a wrinkle on the liberal pluralist ideal where democratic participation is no longer defined in terms of access to the public discourse, but even more narrowly, in terms of access to the technology.

We need to also evaluate the impact of community-based media on the mobilization and organization of social movements (Strangelaar, 1985) that are working to change power relations at all levels. Rafael Roncagliolo, a Peruvian media critic, in an address to international video producers in Montreal, suggested we need to make a distinction between alternatives that position themselves on the borders of mainstream institutions of the market and the state and those that actively oppose dominant relations. In other words, we need to choose between the alternative and the *alterative*: "that which has the power to stir things up and create change". (Roncagliolo, 1991)

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*Dorothy Kidd has been active in a variety of community-based media in Canada for twenty years, has worked in video, radio, aboriginal and multi-lingual broadcasting, volunteers at Vancouver Co-operative radio, and is preparing an article on women and grass roots media. Dorothy extends thanks to Eleanor O'Donnell and Denise Nadeau for their helpful suggestions.*



## Citizen Producers in Eastern Europe, 1989-1991

By Chris Hill

Video news magazines produced with consumer camcorders by citizens' groups in Hungary (Black Box) and former Czechoslovakia (Original Video Journal) were part of vital underground news networks prior to government reforms in 1989-90. Black Box documented 60,000 people demonstrating in front of the Magyar TV building in Budapest in 1992 because the Media Law, a national telecommunications act establishing that TV and radio be free from government interference, was (and remains) threatened by conservative leadership. Citizens' camcorders documented citizens and soldiers battling for the control of television studios and radio transmitters in Romania in 1989 and in Lithuania in 1991. And government-controlled TV crews decided in 1989-91 to broadcast reports on strikes and mass demonstrations against censoring authorities in former Czechoslovakia, Romania and the former USSR, signaling to their fellow citizens that a democratic media would be an essential public stage for setting new political and cultural agendas in Eastern Europe.

In examining tapes produced during this period of dramatic reform in Eastern Europe, it is clear that camcorder documentation of public dialogue and active resistance, the timely copying and wide distribution of videotaped evidence of activism, and the control of TV and radio broadcast studios and transmitters were strategic challenges to centralized communications systems which controlled access to the means of production and distribution of information.

Independent work from 1989-91 not only testifies to a public's passionate desire for free speech and creation of open channels, it additionally challenged the often decades-long inability of most of the citizenry in Eastern Europe to simply access duplication technologies — printing presses, xerox machines, tape dubbing, making prints of films. When speaking to people about media and information exchange before the reforms of 1989-90, most describe gossip and samizdat — illegal printed materials and most recently illegal video— as the primary channels of opposition.

Many Americans would find life without copiers virtually inconceivable and would voice solidarity with media activists in Eastern Europe, understanding that challenging their monolithic media apparatus would be fundamental to establishing new and democratic societies. Of course, our own self-congratulating democratic society reflects the deadly injustices of keeping certain communities virtually invisible within mainstream media, of reducing the articulation of important issues to sound bites, and of limiting the access of a diverse spectrum of speakers to a public stage.

During the past year I collaborated with Keiko Sei, a journalist working since 1987 with independent media makers in Budapest, Prague and Bucharest, to organize for U.S. audiences a program of videotapes made by citizens' video collectives, independent TV producers and artists

in Eastern Europe, most of them using camcorders and simple off-line editing such as is commonly available through public access centers.

Like public access producers here, citizens' groups in these countries were producing video documentation of unreported political and cultural events. Underground video news magazines by the Czech Original Video Journal (OVJ), for example, show East Germans in August 1989 (three months before the Berlin Wall fell and the Velvet Revolution resulted in major reforms in former Czechoslovakia), demanding temporary asylum in Prague and finally emigration to West Germany. These desperate asylum-seekers who occupied the city center for days provoked what was later described as the beginning of the dissolution of existing governments. The OVJ tapes are fascinating because, as with a good public access show, the producers demonstrate a commitment to participate actively in a public dialogue enriched by independent points of view.

Without access to any legal public exhibitions or channels, however, these tapes — important evidence of active opposition to existing policies and governments — were screened in private apartments or storefronts and bicycled to other towns, often at great personal risk. The Hungarian Black Box collective began in 1987 to create an independent underground video archive and circulate news reports. Through the reform period of 1988-90 they documented landmark political meetings, late night shredding and dumping of official records, rallies of emerging nationalist groups, interviews with disenfranchised ethnic minority communities. Their illegal tapes became widely distributed public evidence that official authorities were being challenged by citizens in different parts of the country. Hungarian writer Marianna Padi remarks: "The force and potential danger the Black Boxes represent against power



— From 1989: the Real Power of TV  
by Gusztav Hamos,  
Hungary, 1991



"...it is clear that camcorder documentation of public dialogue and active resistance, the timely copying and wide distribution of videotaped evidence of activism, and the control of TV and radio broadcast studios and transmitters were strategic challenges to centralized communications systems..."

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**"You can't trust television. Regimes come and go, who knows what part of Hungarian and world history Hungarian TV puts away for the future."**

abusers in Hungary lies in the mere existence of their compiled material. The obese Black Box archives (the result of their indefatigable, constant presence virtually everywhere where the 'flow' is likely to become an 'event') form not just a collection of news items. They constitute a fragment of the hidden conscience of the country" (from "Black Box," in *Next 5 Minutes Zapbook*, 1992).

After the 1989-91 reforms, the reconstruction of national media resources became highly contested territory. Decisions around (de)centralization of resources and access to production and distribution

directly impacted political, social, and cultural agendas in nation-building.

Furthermore, media channels and viewers/consumers constituted an economic asset which could function as part of some government's construction of the public good or be exchanged for much needed cash

in times of extreme economic hardship.

In Lithuania in 1992, one year after declaring independence from the former USSR, evening television offered hours of national debate on restructuring housing policies, modestly produced by local crews, as well as imported entertainment and the world news from satellite—music videos from Moscow, films from Poland, international news from Great Britain. In a recent interview, independent Hungarian TV producers Judit Kopper and Andras Solyom estimated that 40% of Hungarian television is imported, much of it from the U.S. While Americans become xenophobic over foreign investors buying up U.S. urban real estate, farms and businesses, there is little information presented to the public here about how the second largest net U.S. export, entertainment media, functions as part of the cultural diet and national economy in developing countries.

Produced for television from 1988-93, Kopper's encyclopedic series *Videoworld* addressed the enterprises of mass and personal media making in both Eastern and Western Europe. In *Mihaly Kornis Videouniverse* she reported on the personal video archive of a well-known Hungarian writer who claimed "You can't trust television. Regimes come and go, who knows what part of Hungarian and world history Hungarian TV puts away for the future. Maybe they save everything, but I can imagine they might not show it to me."

Their program *TV Boris and Video Misha* studied the struggle on Soviet television between what was described as Eastern word-dominated and Western image-based media cultures. Kopper remarked, "We

involved with Videoworld and still ask ourselves the question over and over again: what really is video?..an art which works like narcotics and is a drug to both young and old?.. a weapon of politics?.. a mis-used means of communication in international and national television?" Kopper and Solyom's incisive media analysis and sincere questioning of both media consumption and media making by amateurs, artists and television professionals is unlike any U.S. commercial television I am aware of. In its attention to heartfelt local cultural concerns and the development of public dialogue it is much more akin to public access programming. In December, 1993, *Videoworld* was cancelled by the newly empowered conservative national leadership.

Other remarkable documents from this period include Gusztav Hamos' tape *1989 — the Real Power of TV* featuring his grandmother in Budapest watching the international events of 1989 on her TV and Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's 1992 film *Videogrammes — a Revolution* which reconstructs the events of December 1989 in Bucharest from collected video footage produced by many citizens' camcorders as well as the cameras in the besieged television studio that broadcast continuously for five days. Unlike most of the U.S. which saw edited "highlights" from this period as part of their daily predigested news diet, some Western European media services and notably neighboring Hungary and Czechoslovakia, which were in the midst of radical government reforms themselves, carried live coverage around the clock.

Farocki and Ujica's title suggests that the video footage of events, the "videogrammes" themselves, equate to a kind of revolution, a radical revisioning of the public established through fellow citizens' seeing, recording and transmitting of events, through people temporarily taking control of the means of media production and the dissemination of information.

In recent years as political and economic instability continues throughout the region, much of what was originally claimed by demonstrative citizens as public space has been contested or taken back by ruling elites. We, too, have seen an erosion of public space in the U.S. in recent years, and democratic access to the expanding information superhighway will surely be an ongoing struggle. But an oppositional voice did emerge in Eastern Europe as Hungarians, Czechoslovaks and Romanians in 1989-1990 were able to focus available media, the modest camcorder productions bicycled through the city as well as the cameras and microphones tethered to the broadcast towers, to disseminate information and establish new electronic forums, however fragile, where public agendas could be debated.

Chris Hill has served on the Board of Directors of BCAM, Buffalo's public access operator, since 1990, and is video curator at Hallwalls, an artists-run center in Buffalo, New York. The tapes described are part of a touring program *Eastern Europe — TV & Politics*. She can be contacted c/o Hallwalls, 2495 Main Street, #425, Buffalo, New York 14202, 716/ 884-4571.

**— From 1989: the Real Power of TV by Gusztav Hamos, Hungary, 1991.**

**Judit Kopper's tapes are available through Video Data Bank — 312/345-3550**

**Gusztav Hamos' tape is distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix — 212/966-4605**

**Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's film can be rented from Drift Distribution — 212/254-4118.**





# Yet Another Cautionary Note on the Electronic Superhighway

By Bob Devine

If we examine the rough outline of the national information infrastructure that is emerging, and situate it within the context of the growth and development of the cable industry, we find the following:

**The system will be mass-distribution- rather than communication-oriented.** Streeter (1987) notes that the original "blue sky" predictions with regard to diversity in cable television have never materialized. Cable has tended to seek "the same mass audiences that broadcast networks have traditionally sought" (p. 194). The idea of narrowcasting — reaching discrete audiences with special interest programming — has always been one of the major features differentiating cable from broadcasting, but cable and satellite delivered channels have consistently directed efforts toward "reaching mass audiences with programs of distinct commercial appeal" (Brown, 1980, p. 18). The electronic superhighway vision emphasizes the volume and diversity of programming services possible, and the concomitant choices available to the consumer. A large number of programming services, however, does not necessarily correlate with diversity if those services are carrying similar programming (DeJong and Bates, 1991, p. 160). The market forces that shape programming on the electronic superhighway will require special interest programming to have "sufficiently attractive" demographics to survive (Winner, 1993, p. B2) and as Bollier (1993) reminds us, "much of the excellent television programming which has been aimed at education, civic participation and theater has not been able to survive the fierce gales of marketplace competition" (p. 3). The thresholds for entry to the electronic superhighway will require that programming and information services find a mass audience to support and sustain them.

**Construction and Programming of the system will be market- rather than need-driven.** An article in the *Washington Post* cites an industry analyst as saying, "They're not linking fiber to satellites in Harlem" (Skrzycki and Fahri, 1993, p. H7). The test beds and sophisticated systems for delivering a wide range of interactive telecommunications systems to the home are for the most part located in communities that have "robust demographics" (p. H7). There is clear indication that the development is driven by a need to extend and enhance markets and to distribute commodities and services to an affluent and electronically literate segment of the population rather than to address a social agenda of communications needs. The heralded access to on-line health and education benefits, for example, was brought into sharp relief in a recent California Public Utilities Commission meeting; educators there informed the Commission that, while access to networks is through phone lines, only two percent of the state's school rooms have telephones in them (Haugsted, 1993, p. 110). In its prospectus on *Promoting the Public Interest*, the Benton Foundation (1993) notes that, "...these new networks are costly; they are likely to be built for the rich long before they reach the poor." Those services that are most likely to be available are those services which are most likely to generate the revenue necessary to make the system profitable. Meehan's (1988) study of Warner's QUBE system argues that the programming in a market-driven system will also sacrifice diversity and public good to commercial viability. The developmental phase of *MTV*, Meehan argues, excluded black or urban music because the white suburban audience of the Columbus testbed for QUBE provided demographics which were more attractive to advertisers, and did not prefer that diverse range of expression (p. 176). At the same time, the evolution of Columbus' *Pinwheel* channel into the

satellite-delivered *Nickelodeon* channel, she contends, involved moving from a programming model of education-centered public good (a strategy for securing the franchise) to a model of commercial viability that in many cases ignored and compromised the educational and public values of the original model (p. 180). It is unlikely that a market-driven system will attend to public good or minoritarian interests in delivering programming, except as those interests are commercially viable.

**Service delivery will be privatized and tiered by ability to pay.** The benefits of the electronic superhighway will be available to those who can afford them. We already can see the emergence of a two-class system in the pay-as-you go programs of museums and libraries, in the qualitative differences between public and private education, and in tiering of basic and pay cable. If we examine the diffusion patterns of these technologies most often associated with the superhighway metaphor, their middle-class grounding becomes apparent. Sixty-eight percent of American households own a VCR, and the use/ownership of one communications technology seems to correlate with ownership and/or use of others. Seven out of ten cable households have a VCR, while one in six VCR households also owns a camcorder. VCR households tend to be larger, younger and more upscale than non-VCR households with 64 percent living in the largest metro areas. Eighty percent of VCR households have an income of over \$40,000 a year, and as a group VCR owners spend \$13 billion a year on videotape purchase and rental<sup>1</sup>. The personal computer has found its way into 25 percent of American homes, but again it is primarily the "upper deck" households that have acquired such information processing capacity.<sup>2</sup> Cable penetration crossed the 60 percent threshold during 1991<sup>3</sup>, and in spite of the fact that less than half of all cable subscribers think that the programming is better than broadcast television, it is predicted that cable will reach 70 percent of U.S. households by 1994<sup>4</sup>. In the example of cable television, while DeJong and Bates (1991, p. 164) find that both the absolute and relative diversity of cable channels increased between 1976 and 1986, they also note that the major gains in diversity are available to those who can pay for them. The availability of diverse information and services, has, in effect, been privatized. The flow of information, hence, continues to follow the contours of existing information. It seems safe to assume that use of the more sophisticated capacities and services provided by broadband delivery will also be the province of the middle- and upper-middle classes. Clearly the technological base that we assume to be standard for most projections of an informationally rich future is contingent on discretionary income, and to some degree will be accessible only to certain segments of the broad population.

**Access to the superhighway will be limited.** Dordick (Freedom Forum, 1993) notes that the national information service implied by the "electronic superhighway" metaphor should imply, "...a strong complement of the public good, universally available to all, regardless of income, education, literacy and language proficiency, geographic location, class, race, and any other of the potentially divisive and discriminatory issues that often corrupt our society" (p. 23). If the delivery of information and social services is tied to marketability, such delivery will be (a) aimed at, (b) built for, (c) programmed for, and (d) priced for those who can best afford the services, rather than for those who most need them. The result will be "divergences in opportunity

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and in the consequences of communication between haves and have-nots," (McQuail, 1987, p. 443) and general economic stratification in terms of access to delivered services. Using the electronic superhighway to initiate communications, to interact around messages with other community members, or to add one's voice or cultural practice to the marketplace will be accessible to those few entities who own, manage and program the network and to those who are sufficiently resourced to lease time on the system. Even the sort of "equitable access" for nonprofit public interest groups advocated by the Benton Foundation (1993, p. 5) does not fully succeed in permitting a "robust, diverse, competitive information environment" in that a wide range of potential speakers or information providers will simply not be able to gain access.

**Interactivity will be confined to a consumer menu.** The vision for interactivity in the original "wired city" scenario was that of a large channel capacity permitting a variety of services which would enhance public dialogue, permit direct citizen participation, allow for governmental educational and health institutions to communicate with one another, and in general improve the efficiency of municipal services (Moss, 1984, p. 235). Subscribers would be able to participate in electronic polling, to send and receive messages, and participate in home shopping, while services such as utility meter reading and home security would be facilitated through the cable network (p. 235). The QUBE version of interactivity offered subscribers the opportunity to name a baby, "gong" an amateur talent program, order a boxing match or uninterrupted movie (Dolan, 1984, p. 68) as well as some participatory public affairs programming (Davidge, 1987, p. 88). Criticism of the public polling conducted by QUBE as "unscientific" and "a prescription for chaos" (Dolan, 1984, p. 69) however, prompted Warner-Amex to pull back from interactive programming dealing with more substantive and significant public issues (Davidge, 1987, p. 98). Research on wired city experiments indicated that interactive programming did not have a clear definition (Becker, 1987, p. 121), that television viewers did not prefer the interactive services to the conventional delivery of one-way programming (King, 1987, p. 410). The National Science Foundation sponsored studies of interactive testbeds in Reading, Pennsylvania, Spartanburg, South Carolina and Rockford, Illinois, produced some qualified successes in a range of service applications (Moss, 1976, p. 469; Becker, 1987, p. 112), while the QUBE experiments seemed to indicate a public preference for movies and entertainment. Current visions of interactivity do not share the same sorts of concerns that were the subject of interactive testbeds of the 1970s. The social concerns regarding the effects of programming on audiences, how organizations use the technology, and the uses of technology for "general involvement in social and political processes" (Becker, 1987, p. 105.) has been transformed to a concern with enhancing, "the way people manipulate entertainment in their home" (Moss, 1993, p. 9). The menu of interactive services being contemplated on the supply-driven side of the development of the electronic superhighway include:

...stand-alone channels, such as the Game Channel; transactional services, such as home shopping; video games and contests; movies and video-on-demand; ads-on-demand; on-screen program guides; and informational and educational offerings (p. 9).

The latitude for interaction in this vision — shopping, viewing diverse ads, movies and educational offerings and playing games — is carefully circumscribed within the consumer role. The interactive choices in those systems currently in development or on the drawing board are from a limited (though expanding) range of products and services preselected by the system operator on the basis of their market appeal, the interactions themselves are not with programmers or

with other community members, but with the system operators, and the interactant does not really have the ability to initiate communication interactions that are not tied to requests for products or services. Such systems have been more appropriately characterized as "reactive" (Williams, 1977, pp. 139-140; Streeter, 1987, p. 194) and "interpassive" (Winner, 1993, p. B2) than as interactive. Raboy (1991) describes the emerging telecommunications infrastructure as one in which "the commercial replaces the public and the citizen is redefined as a consumer" (p. 165).

**The public dimension will be diminished, if not absent.** The array of media and networks engendered by the electronic superhighway lead in two directions. On the one hand, they turn the consumer away from the local, toward watching programming from afar, consuming mass media without any real interaction, and even shopping without interaction. On the other hand, they turn the consumer toward the very personal; self-entertaining through games, interactive software programs or watching movies at home rather than in a theater, time shifting and self-structuring, and working at home via computer interface. The problem with the technologies of the electronic superhighway is that they seem to foster private culture, expand private space and result in the diminution of a public sphere. Given the array of "future" technologies, a person can work, bank, be entertained and even browse the public library from the confines of the private space of the home. The newspaper can be delivered by modem, interactions can be conducted by e-mail, and electronic polling projections can make democratic participation, including voting, unnecessary. Those connected to the national information infrastructure will have tremendous freedom of choice, but for the most part the choices will be constrained to private consumption, taking place almost entirely in a private sphere. What is missing from the vision is the public level of interaction around messages that binds a community together. Consuming involves interaction, but it does not include the full spectrum of interaction that is called "communication", and when accomplished in the private arena of the home, it also fails to engage the participant in the issues, concerns and cultural expressions that are held in common by a community. Further, the richness of presentational and interactive codes involved in human communication is diminished by electronic interaction as well. The telephone strips away the presentational codes of gesture, facial expression, kinesics and proxemics, while computer-based forms of communicative interaction remove intonation, pace, rhythm and timing of interactions, enunciation and the prosodic codes from the communication. In addition, privatizing electronic communications diminish or eliminate many of the basic characteristics of interactivity — negotiation of a means of exchange, small grain, interruptibility, turn-taking, graceful degradation, guided interpretation and the common production of meaning. The implications of the use of privatizing technologies is the erosion of the capabilities for reasoned public discourse, and the absence of an arena in which a public might constitute itself and forge public opinion.

**The voices in the marketplace will be few.** Those that provide entertainment and/or information services for a mass audience will predominate, and those who, "have far better access than their potential rivals to the social, financial and organizational resources needed to effectively create and promote ideas" (Ginsberg, 1986, p. 89), will be most able to utilize the reach of the electronic superhighway to enter into the marketplace. An optimistic scenario might include the voices of non-profit public interest organizations in the electronic marketplace, but those voices will speak for, speak about and interpret the local, the disenfranchised, the minority voice or the "other". The diverse voices of the "audience" can be polled and measured in



the aggregate, but again, the few will speak for and about the many, and the multitude of tongues envisioned in utilitarian interpretations of the First Amendment will not be able to participate or to be heard.

The much-heralded diversity that the superhighway might bring us will be (a) suspiciously familiar in form, style and genre to the mass market materials that now fill up the channel lineup<sup>5</sup>, and (b) conveniently matched to our ability to pay. Our geographic communities stand a great chance of leading parallel lives; we might share viewing experiences with those who have the same ability to purchase specialized entertainment or information services, but our electronic environment will be generic and non-local. Our participation will involve making and enacting consumer choices rather than debating options, forging public opinion or creating culture.

Fifty years of public policy with regard to communications has been aimed at (a) stimulating and invigorating local political dialogue, and (b) vitalizing and sustaining local cultural life. For the most part regulation has sought these ends through the protection of the listener, by attempting to ensure many voices — local voices — and trying to bolster the utilitarian concept of a lively and accessible marketplace of ideas. The opening of the UHF spectrum attempted to open up opportunities for local independent voices, but the effort for the most part failed to accomplish its objectives. The prime-time give-back rules, aimed at stimulating local public affairs and cultural programming created a syndicated ghetto of game shows. The ongoing debates about must-carry rules for local channels on cable seems destined for the same kind of failure. And now we are confronted with a high speed, high-tech, capital intensive superhighway which will roar past our local community geographies carrying an abundance of programming and services — all directing the users attention away from the “community” which has, in the past, been the main locus of “holding in common”. While some are worried about having sufficient on-ramps for this superhighway and the tolls involved, I am concerned about those who, in the language of the metaphor, cannot afford to own or rent a car and sometimes cannot even afford the gasoline. Everett Parker (Freedom Forum, 1993) points out that “In Watts, on the west side of Chicago, in Crown Heights and Washington Heights, there are no faxes. There is no voice mail or data processing and sometimes not even phone service....The way in which we are deploying and using electronic technologies makes it absolutely necessary that we face up to this moral and political aspect of the electronic environment” (p. 28). I am concerned about the local cultural practices that will be bypassed as surely as the highway bypassed Glenrio, Texas, about the local public debates that need to take place, about the community participation that is so essential, about the many voices and the vernacular.

Public access, it seems, is one of the few arenas in which such concerns can be addressed. In the earlier “wired city” vision the concept of town-hall-like public discussion and participation played a central role. Access was not limited to consumer choices about home-delivered information and entertainment, but involved giving voice to the minority perspectives, nurturing vital public debate and discussion, bringing private citizens into public life, balancing local and global perspectives, and ensuring participation in civic life and in the formation of public opinion. In the “electronic superhighway” vision, it seems,

continued next page

## Resources on the National Information Infrastructure

► **The Telecommunications Policy Roundtable** has its own Internet Discussion List that includes many documents concerning telecommunications legislation and the perspectives of various organizations participating in the Telecommunications Policy Roundtable. To Subscribe, send an e-mail message addressed to LISTPROC@CNI.ORG with a one-line message that says, “subscribe roundtable your name”

► **For information about the Telecommunication Policy Roundtable**, pending bills and possible public responses contact

- Δ The Center for Media Education (202) 628-2620
- Δ The Alliance for Community Media (202) 393-2650
- Δ The Electronic Frontier Foundation (202) 347-5400
- Δ Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (202) 544-9240
- Δ NAMAC (510) 451-2717

► **The Center for Media Education** has just published the first issue of *Interactive*, a newsletter dealing with technologies related to the Superhighway, grants and funding opportunities and Washington policy updates. Contact The Center for Media Education 1511 K St., N.W. Suite 518, Washington, D.C. 20005: telephone 202-628-2620; fax (202) 628-2544; e-mail [cme@access.digex.net](mailto:cme@access.digex.net).

► **For information on various state policy initiatives and model telecommunications legislation**, contact Richard Civile at the Center for Civic Networking, P.O. Box 55272, Washington, DC 20035; telephone (202)362-3831; fax (202) 408-1056; e-mail [rciville@civicnet.org](mailto:rciville@civicnet.org)

► **TAP-INFO is an Internet Distribution List** provided by the Taxpayer Assets Project (TAP). TAP was founded by Ralph Nader to monitor the management of government property, including information systems and data, government funded R&D, spectrum allocation and other government assets. TAP-INFO reports on TAP activities related to federal information policy. Subscription requests to TAP-INFO to [listserv@essential.org](mailto:listserv@essential.org) with the message: “subscribe tap-info your name”

● **DEV MEDIA is another Internet Distribution List** for participatory radio, video and TV practitioners working for the democratisation of communication.

*Organizations posting to the list include:*

Δ **Videoazimut** - An international coalition, founded in 1990, that brings together people from the world of independent and alternative video and television from every continent. Together its members act to promote the democratic practice of communication. They aim to broaden the participation by communities and movements from the South and North in sound and image production

Δ **AMARC** - The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. Supports community and alternative radio stations that involve people in participatory communication processes

Δ **Don Snowdon Centre for Development Support Communication**. Supports the practice of using communication tools (especially small format video) in participatory action research and development. Located at Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada.

Subscription requests to DEV MEDIA to [listserv@uoguelph.ca](mailto:listserv@uoguelph.ca) with the message: “subscribe devmedia your name”



## Coalition for Independent Media

**A new coalition has been formed to be the voice for independent media to legislators and policy-makers at the federal level.**

**NAMAC, the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF) and the Alliance for Community Media have joined forces to found a national consortium to advocate for media arts and community media. Current members include the National Asian American Telecommunications Association, the National Coalition of Independent Public Broadcasting Producers, the Independent Television Service and the National Federation of Community Broadcasters.**

**The consortium has three goals: 1) to coordinate information and commission research projects as needed, 2) to educate and inform independents on key policy issues, and 3) to put into place advocacy systems to mobilize constituencies to respond at critical points. One focus of the consortium's work will be on the regulation of the range of new emerging technologies: a nationwide fiber optics network, "video dialtone", high definition television, Direct Broadcast Satellites, and interactive television. In addition, the Consortium will advocate on issues of access to public television (such as reauthorization of the Independent Television Service) and federal funding for the arts. For more information on the work of the consortium contact Martha Wallner at AIVF (212) 473-3400 or Julian Low at NAMAC (510) 451-2717. [From Media Matters, Vol. 12, No. 2, March/April 1994]**

public access and community communications could be a mere footnote.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Research Alert, *Future Vision: The 189 Most Important Trends of the 1990s*. Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks Trade, 1991, pp. 153-155.

<sup>2</sup>Research Alert, *Ibid.*, p. 138. In their article "Knowledge and Equality: Harnessing the Tides of Information Abundance," Harry Tennant and George H. Heilmeier note (a) the growth in "knowledge workers" to sixty percent of the American workforce, (b) the decline by six percent of the blue-collar workforce between 1978 and 1985, and (c) the increase by twenty-one percent of the white-collar workforce between 1978 and 1985. The implications of such stratified exposure to and experience with information processing technology for a future workforce in which knowledge work will be dominant are staggering. Tennant and Heilmeier, "Knowledge and Equality: Harnessing the Tides of Information Abundance," in Leebaert, ed., *Technology 2001: The Future of Computing and Communications*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991.

<sup>3</sup>"Facts and Figures," *MultiChannel News*. December 16, 1991.

<sup>4</sup>Research Alert, *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup>A study by Waterman and Grant (1991) of "Cable Television as an Aftermarket" found that (1) programming hours on cable are skewed toward aftermarket offerings from commercial broadcast media and theatrical release, and (2) that cable's role as a producer of narrowcast programming "may be surpassed by its function as a co-producer of relatively broad-appeal programming" (p. 179).



\*\*\*\* **BBS System Announcements** \*\*\*\*

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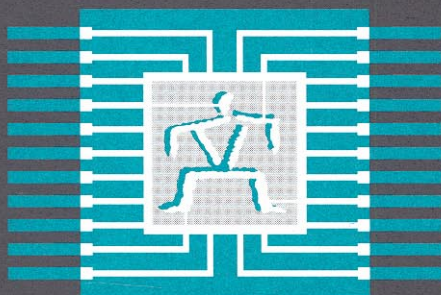
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